

Fertile Ground

FOR PEOPLE WHO DIG PARENTING



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FROM THE TRENCHES

Soil Chart
Stacey Greenberg

It seems like we did nothing but travel over the summer. Satchel is now a seasoned flyer after going to California, North Dakota, New Mexico, and Minnesota for various family and friend gatherings. (Warren's cover design was inspired by our trip to Taos, New Mexico.) Due to missed flights, crowded airports, and too many connections, I think I have actually started to idealize the month we spent on the road last summer!

Thanks to everyone who responded so positively to my last issue. I am feeling much better and am doing really well. Now that I am part of the miscarriage club, I have been doing a lot of reading and thinking on the subject. I have included a great piece on miscarriage by Laura Moulton in this issue. She takes a much lighter approach than I did with "Unbirth" and I think her style is just fantastic. Also in this issue you will find not one, but TWO birth stories that detail drug/intervention free *hospital* births. Hearing stories like these always makes me happy. I've also included a birth story by Bee Lavender that not only details the birth of her son, but of the Hip Mama community.

Don't worry, issue four isn't all about birth. I have some great stories on raising babies, being a lactivist, growing up Jewish, plus a fiction piece by Fertile Ground's most celebrated contributor, Ashley Harper, and lots of fun stuff like a Lactivist quiz, a cunt for you to color, and much much more. I hope you like this issue and that you will consider renewing your subscription and maybe even buying some gift subscriptions! See the back page for more details.

Oh and I can't forget to tell you that I'm pregnant again. My due date is just two days shy of Satchel's second birthday (April 21, 2004)! Wish me luck. Last but not least, I wanted to share my very first "Letter to the Editor." It's from my good friend Beth Myler who was in my Peace Corps training group. It's letters like this that make doing this zine so fulfilling. Thanks for reading.

Dear Stacey,

I got FG #3 on Saturday after having worked the whole day. I cracked open the zine as soon as I got home and started reading it back to front, as many lefties do. I was a quarter through your piece "Unbirth" when we were supposed to walk across the street to a neighbor's house for a BBQ. I read while we walked and almost tripped a dozen times.

Then Paul and Gabriel left me on the front porch steps as I continued to read, totally oblivious to anything else, while they went inside. I sat there reading and musing until my friend came out to inquire about me. I had a hard time saying anything. I just didn't want to talk to her. I didn't want to talk to

anyone who hadn't read the zine, or been in the Peace Corps, or known me since childhood, or god damn it- heard some of my real stories! While reading FG, I felt connected to a part of myself that yearns to express parenting and life issues with more depth and intelligent humor. But as your literary voice came through so clearly, I really missed YOU. I was remembering hearing some of your life stories for the FIRST time when we sat outside under African skies drinking 32 oz. beers and avoiding going back to our Cameroonian homestay parents. I thought about the amazing ways that you have grown and changed and I wondered if I had? I felt envious that you have made creative writing/editing/literary pursuits a priority and therefore held onto so many of your stories.

Sometimes I feel totally disconnected to my past, like I have run from my own stories and buried them...bored of them...ashamed of them....used the excuse of busy lives...surviving... sustaining myself with convenient friendships in which I can morph too comfortably into someone who doesn't mind just shooting the shit while the kids play in the yard. I am secretly wishing that some of my own stories had already been recorded because I don't believe I will be able to return to the place I need to go to feel them in order to write them now the way that I want them to be. In high school, I kept a journal for a few sporadic years, even thought about being a writer. I remember the "high" I felt when I was able to unload some of my adolescent angst onto the pages of that pink, flowered book, carefully reading and re-reading my words, trying to act as my own therapist. When my parents got divorced my senior year I think I decided that my writing was just childish ramblings and in order to grow up quickly, I put away my flowered journal.

Once in college, I poured my heart out in a 5 page letter to an older guy I was dating back home. It was the cliff notes to the years since that I hadn't kept a journal at all. After he broke my heart, I wanted that letter back so badly. I fantasized about traveling around the country retrieving his, and all of my other letters, to ex-boyfriends, friends and relatives and sealing them all safe in a metal box. I was just GIVING away my stories to people, but not wanting, or able, to own them and care for them properly. Eventually, my letter writing tapered off to sporadic notes to people I owed words to. I then took to reading medical texts, lactation and parenting guide books, then drug addiction memoirs and autobiographies, almost exclusively. Unable to finish a work of fiction in the past five years, I continue to make comments like, "I guess I am just more attracted to other people's 'real life' stories at this point.

Stacey, I just wanted you to know that your words were truly HEARD by me, not thrown in the trash or put on a shelf. In reading your work and missing you, I have recognized that I miss ME. Hope this is a start to rediscovering my stories.

Love,
Beth

Please don't hesitate to send your own love letter to me!

A Hospital Homebirth

Andria Cline

I went to my OB appointment on Wednesday, which was in the middle of my 41st week of pregnancy. I was measuring right on target for my gestation, and had a slightly dilated and fairly well effaced cervix. I was, as they say, "ripe," but there was no way to know when the baby would decide to come – could be hours, could be days.

Wednesday night was restless, but I woke up on Thursday feeling wide-awake. When I made my first morning trip to the bathroom, I realized that I'd lost at least part of my mucus plug. I kept thinking I was feeling twinges in my belly, but then would talk myself into believing that they were imagined. I started my work day and tried to focus on other things, but as the morning wore on, I noticed that the twinges seemed to be coming pretty regularly, whether I thought about them or not. I tried to stay comfortable, which meant a lot of time sitting on or draping myself over a birth ball. I called Melissa, my doula, and gave her the status report. She was confident that the baby was coming, although she did warn me that there could still be another day or so of this type of labor.

The afternoon blended into the evening. I snacked a lot and drank water pretty much constantly. Jeff stayed at work during the day (per my request – I wasn't ready for his eager/anxious energy), and we decided it was okay for him to teach his evening class, although he promised to keep it short. By the time he got home, my contractions were about ten minutes apart and getting noticeably stronger, although I could still walk around and talk through them.

We got into nightclothes and tried to rest, but I was too uncomfortable lying down while the contractions were happening. Around 11:30, the contractions were about six minutes apart and I was having trouble doing anything but deep breathing while they peaked, so we decided to call Melissa. She was over about half an hour later and watched me go through a few contractions to assess my status. I was still pretty composed at that point - I was doing nice, effective breathing and walking/rocking gracefully during each rush.

Shortly after Melissa arrived, I lost the last of my mucus plug and finally observed the "bloody show" that usually accompanies this. I was spotting pretty heavily from then on, and soon after that, we realized that I was having double contractions - just when I thought one was over, another would come right up behind it. I could tell that Jeff and Melissa both wanted to get to the hospital, but I think my nervousness about sitting through the drive made me hold off a while longer. I finally gave in around 1:00 am and we got ready to go. We stepped outside at 1:23, and just as I sent Jeff back inside to get the bottled drinks we forgot to grab, my very considerate water broke all over the front porch. I squish-waddled back inside to change shorts and shoes, and then we officially got on our way.

Thankfully, the roads were almost entirely empty, because that was not the safest drive we ever took. Jeff only ran one red light, when a signal refused to give us a green left turn arrow, but he was on edge and going as fast as he felt he could. My contractions felt more intense, partly from being in a sitting

position and partly from having my water gone. I began low moaning through each rush instead of just deep breathing. I started getting really hot, and my legs began to shake, so I had a pretty good idea that I was in transition.

We got to the hospital and of course had to sign some papers and answer questions and go through the whole ER triage system. Melissa and Jeff did their best to keep my involvement to a minimum, although Jeff was fairly hard-pressed to answer questions about my social security number or height. Once I got processed, the ER nurse asked me to get in a wheelchair for the trip up to the birthing center, but there was no way I was going to do that – sitting down was just too painful. I refused as politely as I could, over her repeated insistence that it was a pretty long walk.

My memory gets a little hazy once we arrived at the birthing center. I felt like we walked off the elevator and into my room, although I realized afterward that there was quite some distance between those two points. We then met Stacy, the nurse who would be with us throughout the rest of labor and delivery. Stacy let us know that she'd have to run a monitor strip and put in an IV, so when I was in between contractions she strapped on two monitor belts and put in a heparin lock. At that point I fully understood every woman who ever requested an epidural, because lying there with those belts on made the contractions exponentially more difficult to handle. I got out of bed as soon as they'd let me and I walked around the best that I could. It was hard, though - the increased pain from the belts plus the fact that I was leaking blood and amniotic fluid on the tile floor made it pretty difficult to reposition myself safely. I kept asking and asking for the belts to be removed, and Stacy got them off as soon as she could. She checked me and I was elated to find out I was eight centimeters dilated.

My moans got deeper and louder, and eventually turned into growls. It didn't erase the intensity of the contractions, but it took some of the edge off. I also walked around in circles, rocked back and forth, and at one point, started twirling around like a demented Phish fan. I was hot and sweaty and desperately thirsty, but the ice chips I was allowed to have just made me feel queasy. I kept fanning myself with my gown between contractions. What they say about losing all modesty during labor is true – I didn't care for a second that my entire lower body was exposed, and in fact, I probably would have been even happier if I'd been completely naked.

Stacy would quietly step in and monitor me with a Doppler whenever I had a break between contractions. My doctor was called and arrived after I'd been there for about an hour. He stayed very much in the background, though. When I felt like I was unable to refrain from pushing any longer, I asked to be checked again - I was at nine and a half centimeters, just short of full dilation. Getting that last little bit of cervix out of the way was probably one of the toughest obstacles I had to get through. I felt like my entire lower abdomen was being clutched by something strong and hot. There was a tremendous amount of pressure during the contractions, and trying not to push made it harder to focus on pain relief techniques.

We finally decided I was close enough to complete, and I was ready to start pushing. I started out pushing in sort of a modified hands and knees position, with my arms over the back of the raised head of the bed. It was a relief to push, although definitely intense in its own right. And much messier than the contractions alone - I was not only bleeding all over myself, but now that I was focusing on bearing down, anything smaller than a baby that could possibly come out of me tried to do so. Funny how quickly you get over the embarrassment of pooping yourself in public, though. Once I realized how much more effective pushing was if I just gave it my all and didn't worry about what came out, the better I was able to move the baby down. I bled, I peed, I pooped and I pushed. Over and over and over again.

I tried not to look at the clock, but I could tell I'd been working for a while. After about an hour and a half (I think), Stacy and Melissa suggested that I try a different position to help the baby wiggle into a better location, so I tried lying on my side with Jeff supporting my top leg and widening my pelvis while I was pushing. This felt pretty productive, but with no counter-pressure on my back between contractions, I couldn't maintain the position for long. So I eventually ended up in the last place I expected - on my back with my legs pulled up. Stacy supported my perineum with a warm compress and performed perineal massage between contractions. I kept begging Jeff to push on my lower back when he wasn't busy helping to support my legs. His hand must have been under me for nearly an hour, and I knew it couldn't be comfortable for him, but it was the only relief I got from the sharp, spasm-like pain radiating out of my spine.

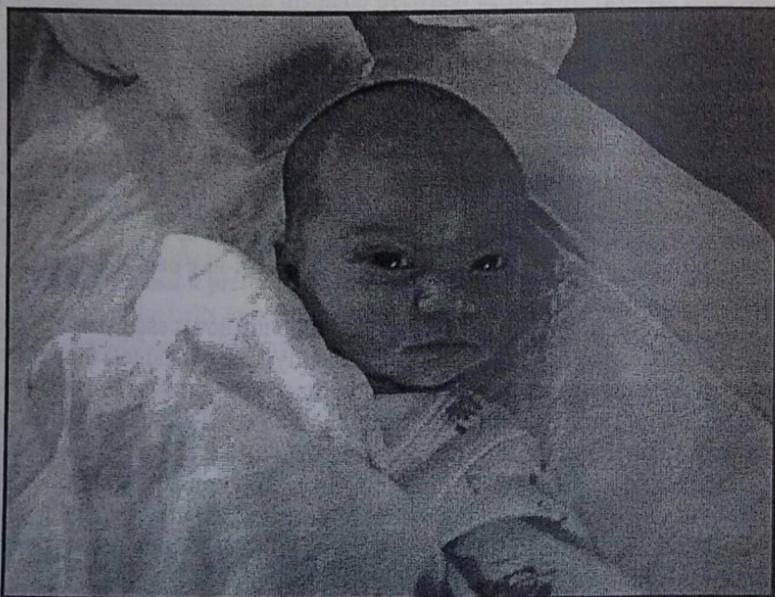
It seemed like I was trying to go up the down escalator, but eventually my doctor started appearing more frequently, and I could tell from the activity around me that I must be getting close. Stacy brought over a mirror so I could see the baby, but there was barely anything to see. I felt both discouraged and defiant. I started making more noise during pushes, clutching the handrails of the bed and doing the best I could to curl myself around the baby. Melissa and Jeff held my legs through each bout of pushing, and they were both talking more and encouraging me to push through the part of each contraction where I felt most tempted to stop.

The environment suddenly got much more medical. Bright lights were focused on my bed, and two new nurses appeared and slid plasticky sheets under me. Those two factors, plus the intensity of pushing, made me unable to handle the heat, so I pulled my gown over my head and lay there completely naked. My doctor reappeared and got into position at the foot of the bed. The new nurses began directing me through pushing, telling me to hold my breath and use that power to increase my power. This was the part of labor that was least like the way I'd imagined it. I'd hoped for a peaceful delivery, ideally with dimmed lights and only quiet, supportive verbal encouragement. Instead, I was baking under floodlights and having strangers boss me around.

Fortunately, it didn't last all that much longer. My entire lower body felt completely full and stretched, although I'm pleased to report that I didn't feel like I was coming apart at the seams, and I kept waiting for a "ring of fire"

sensation that never came. It got to the point where my doctor said "This will be over in three minutes, two minutes or one minute – it's up to you." I'd already been pushing for over two and a half hours, so I voted for one minute. I pushed almost constantly, whether I felt a strong urge or not. Every sensation got more intense, but I was so focused on seeing the baby that I was almost able to push back the entire perception of pain. (Emphasis on almost.)

And then it was there. I looked down and could see the head. It didn't come out all at once like I expected, but within two or three pushes, it was completely delivered. In the next push, the shoulders were free and, at 6:54 am, the entire body was out. My doctor quickly turned the baby to face us – he didn't announce the gender, preferring instead to hand the squirming little bundle over to us and let us make the realization on our own. I barely remember what came out of my mouth, but I think I said "We have a girl."



The nurses dried her off while she was still on my chest, and then wrapped her as best they could without taking her from me. Even after having seen her come out of me, I still couldn't really fathom that she had any connection with what I'd just experienced. I finally turned to Jeff, who was not trying to hide the tears in his eyes, and asked what she looked like. We looked at her together and agreed that she'd be well suited by the name Meredith Harper – Meredith after my godmother, and Harper after the greatest one-time novelist in American literature (and a pretty badass Southern woman to boot). I held and nursed her for nearly an hour before a nurse asked to weigh and examine her. As I saw her across the room, I tried to absorb her existence. We had a daughter. I was a mother. It still didn't seem entirely real, but when I heard a nurse call her by name, or felt her clutch at my skin when she was returned to my arms, I knew she was mine.

Intervention Free Hospital Birth

Blair Henley

Our decision to go the hospital and OB route was based on several factors. First, that's where my husband (a doctor) works. Second, I wasn't as impressed with the independent birthing center as I'd wanted to be. Its backup hospital was infamous and there was instability with the midwives. Third, I had to admit to myself that I did not want a home birth. Deciding between an OB and a midwife was much more difficult. I believe midwifery is the way to go if possible, but I simply did not like the midwife I met at the Vanderbilt midwives group. I was also surprised at how "medicalized" the hospital based midwives were, but my only previous "experience" with midwives was the story of my friend's homebirth with lay midwives and books such as *Babycatcher* (an awesome book by the way). So our decision to have Kate at a conservative hospital with a traditional OB was made not so much as a decision, but as a rejection of other choices. It took me a long time to accept this, and I was extremely stressed about the problems that go along with hospitals and hospital medicine. I finally called a doula and talked to her for a long time. I was nervous about working with a doula because I'm not used to having people take care of me and I imagined it as somewhat uncomfortable. However, I was reassured when all of the OBs in the Vanderbilt group knew her and others said many wonderful things about her.

I was looking forward to going into labor. Silly, I know, considering the pain and frustration that comes with labor, but when I imagined the contractions starting and the hurried trip to the hospital, I couldn't wait. For the last month or so of the pregnancy, I was having slight menstrual cramps. No big deal. About three weeks before my due date (July 10) I had an exam and was 2 cm dilated and 80% effaced. Wow, she was ready to just slip on out! Well, of course that's not what happened, I just seemed to stall there until the big event.

I had imagined and hoped that labor would start with a big woosh - my amniotic sac breaking, jokingly in the aisle at Home Depot, since my husband and I had spent so much time there working on a bathroom renovation at our house. So on July 3, as we were walking around Target, just after leaving Home Depot, and I felt a light trickle, I just sort of smiled and kept quiet. Every couple of hours that day, things felt a little moist, but certainly this wasn't the real deal, right? The next morning, July 4, the situation remained, and I figured if I were really leaking, that I better give the doctors a call because I didn't want to endanger Kate. But oh lord, I did not want a July 4 baby. I knew that if I had ruptured, that I'd have to be induced and deliver that day. I joked that my OB had jinxed my baby into being born on July 4 because he had told me he was on call that day and to come on in. I tried to rationalize the situation by telling myself that I could do worse by welcoming my baby into the world with a whole country full of fireworks. We headed to the hospital.

July 4 turned out to be a very good day. I walked right into an examining room, feeling a little confused, since they seemed to be getting me ready to deliver at some point. Rather than being horrified by the monitoring, I

loved it, because it was a way, rather removed of course, of communicating with Kate. I got to have another ultrasound, and she was right there, fists up, ready to fight the world. I half way hoped that this would be it, they'd pump me up with Pitocin, and we'd get the show on the road. At least that way would be definite; I'd be having the baby. There'd be no waiting, wondering, stressing, and it would be over at some point. Well, no luck, there was no leak. But, the good part of this experience is that I got to meet a very important nurse. Susan was amazing, exactly the kind of person you'd hope for. She was caring and motherly, but not condescending. She calmed my fears but didn't talk to me like I was stupid for coming into the hospital early. Also I got to work with my OB, whom up to that point had been pretty cold towards me and seemingly unaccepting of trying alternative things in the delivery room. I supposed that since I was healthy with a healthy pregnancy, he just didn't feel the need to educate me about anything, thus our visits were short and sweet and he resisted my attempts to talk about issues and fears. He wasn't a bad doctor, but I figured that if he was to be doing the types of things necessary to deliver a baby, I had better get to know him a little better. My visit on July 4 relieved so many of my fears of the hospital, the nurses, and my OB. It wasn't so bad after all. Plus, the OB told me that I would deliver within the next 48 hours.

The impending deadline forced us to get ready. Because we were renovating the upstairs, our house was a total mess. We joked that our living room had become a Home Depot outlet. We hadn't gotten anything ready for the baby. While I relaxed in bed (I needed to hoard my strength and my itty bitty contractions were still around), my husband washed all the baby clothes and put them away. He got the cradle together, put together a changing area, and pretty much got us completely ready to rock and roll once the babe came home. We joked, however, that she would probably still be 2 weeks late, like many first babies. But it was exciting.

July 5 (Saturday) was spent running around the city. I think we did some more baby shopping - but at a different Target this time. We took an old dresser over to some friends' house. We installed the new bathtub. I wasn't exactly resting even though the contractions had gone up a notch in frequency and strength. I didn't want to curse things by calling attention to it, so I just went along with a relatively normal day. I remember standing in my friends' yard, sweating to death, and having my breath taken away by a contraction. But it was still prologue.

That night we took a great sexy bath in the bathtub with the jets on, and I swear that's what really got labor going. The contractions got much more regular. After timing them for a couple of hours, I called my doula to give her a heads up before it got too late. She told me to wait until they were stronger and harder before I called her to come over. Well they got a lot stronger and only 5 minutes apart soon after that. My husband wanted me to call but I wasn't ready and wanted to wait another hour to be sure. We argued about it, both of us sure we were right. And guess what? The contractions stopped. Not just decreased in strength or became less frequent, just stopped. That was disappointing, but I got some sleep.

The next morning, they started up again, not hard, but pretty frequent. I called my doula again, who said to give her a call after a while if I wanted her to come check me. I almost didn't call, because I didn't want to waste her time. But I did, and she came over and unbelievably, I was 4-5 cm already. We talked for a while, ate some snacks, and discussed what to do. We tried a few things to see if we could get the contractions more regular. They all worked. The best was nipple stimulation by my husband. That brought on some big ones. But still, I could talk through most of them. I didn't understand - if I was this far along and really in labor, why wasn't I in pain? We checked again and my doula decided I was far enough along (6-7 cm) to consider going to the hospital. We wanted to get there before 9pm, because after that you have to enter the hospital through the emergency department rather than just walking up to the labor and delivery floor. I called the OB service, and the OB called the hospital and had everything ready for me. There is nothing worse than having strong contractions while driving over potholes. Even though I was much more comfortable going to the hospital, I still was a little nervous about the nurses. I expected confrontation and was relying on my doula to advocate for me.

When we arrived, the OB checked me and said I was 4-5cm. That was upsetting, but everyone still expected me to go pretty fast. I changed into a hospital gown and ate tons of ice chips, which were perfect. During the last few months of my pregnancy, I developed an addiction to ice, so I was pretty damn excited about having all the ice I ever wanted while I was in the hospital. The nurses all knew I wanted to give birth without pain medication, and never once did I hear anything close to a suggestion that I should have some. In fact, the nurses were amazing. Usually, you have to at least get a heparin-lock IV, in case of emergency. Somehow I managed to get away without one. I had intermittent fetal heart monitoring, which didn't bother me, because my labor actually went better when I was in bed. I never once had my contractions monitored, which kept me free to move around when I wanted. The contractions were still strong, but unfortunately not too regular. I ate a lot of ice. I peed. Later my doula pressed on my hips the perfect way to ease the contractions. We talked, but not too much. She taught me how to breathe, how to sink into the contractions. I managed to have some major contractions during transition that I just breathed through and no one knew I was having them. I walked the halls. My main nurse, Mickie, was awesome – perky without being irritating. She even brought us chocolate!

The night wore on. I got frustrated. I was enduring very strong contractions, but nothing seemed to be happening. I was dilating, but everyone thought I'd have the baby by midnight or earlier. I walked. I swayed. I showered. Surprisingly, lying in the hospital bed was the best. My husband was amazing. I don't know where he learned to be with me the way he did that night, but I will always be impressed with how he was. We danced together, he held me up, and even showered with me when I wasn't sure I could stand up. But I still had no baby, and my sac was still intact. People told me how great I was doing, which was nice, but it didn't make the baby come any faster. I was exhausted and mostly frustrated. I paced the room, staring at the huge clock that

should never be on the wall in a delivery room. I told myself that I'd go another hour and then tell them to call anesthesia. I was bored with my choices - walk the halls, pace the room, shower. Never did I wish for any of the things I thought I was supposed to take with me. No music, no pretty lavender candles, no dried fruit. I was completely focused on the contractions.

Around 4am I had had it. I started crying. I wanted to yell at the baby giving god. I said I wanted an epidural, even though I knew that the end was close. Instead, I took a nap. Yep, a 30 minute nap. Then I had a couple of very strong contractions which finally broke my water. A lot of nurses started coming in, and then the doctor. I started pushing with contractions. It took a long time to learn how to hang on to my legs the right way and to make the pushing efficient. I gave it all I could. I kept pushing as the nursing shift changed. My angel nurse from July 4, Susan, appeared. I was so excited. I continued to push as the OB shift changed. The head appeared and slipped back for about 2 hours. I took naps between contractions.

Finally, I got pissed off. Really pissed. Frustration is what finally got Kate's head out. It took over 3 hours to get her head out most of the way. Once I managed to get a shoulder out, the OB pulled her out the rest of the way because her tone was a little limp. I got to hold her, but it was almost like I was looking down at the two of us. I had the most shocked expression. Up until that point, I was still slightly in denial. But there was the proof. A real baby, ours.



Against many others' experiences, against many natural birthing books, and against the culture of hospital medicine, I succeeded in having a safe delivery with no intervention. I am still amazed by the nurses' professionalism and caring. Never did I feel silly, insignificant, or unworthy. The two OBs who assisted in the birth were great and basically left me alone. Even being moved to the post partum room was nice - Susan went with me, and it was as if I were literally transferring to a new stage in my life, one with my daughter.

THE REAL DIRT

Adjusting Kristy Dallas Alley

It's a warm spring afternoon and I am at the playground with an old friend and her neighbor, a woman I have met a few times. Between us we have five boys, who are making good use of the equipment while we sit in the weak sunshine and chat. Two of those boys are mine--the older is four, the younger ten months old, and I am five months pregnant with number three. My old friend has two boys, and the neighbor is a new mother, her only child approaching one year. I have been around her enough to know how shaky she feels about her parenting abilities.

"I don't know how you do it," she marvels. "You just seem so calm, like it's nothing. You have it all together." Her tone indicates that this "togetherness" is in sharp contrast to her lack thereof. For a fleeting moment, I consider taking the compliment graciously, like I am indeed a pro at this mothering thing and worthy of her praise. But that would not be right and I hasten to let her know two things. "First," I say, "I do not have it all together. I have just let it all go. And second, don't worry. When my first was a year old I was busy crying all the time and just generally going to pieces."

It's true. My first baby was what Dr. Sears calls a High Needs Baby, or as I lovingly remember him, Rosemary's Baby. He was born with no ability to self-soothe whatsoever, so the task fell to us, his lucky parents. Nursing him for hours on end was somewhat effective, but at times even the magical boob did not work and we had to try other things to calm his incessant crying. He pretty much cried full time for the first three months of his life, then cut down to half time. Luckily for all of us, I'm a fairly calm person. I am not the type to worry and doubt myself and feel like I am doing something wrong. I felt in an instinctive and uncharacteristically spiritual way that this child had a damaged, fearful spirit. The universe had sent him to me for a reason, and I would rise to the task of showing him that life is good.

Unfortunately, understanding why your world has been flipped inside out does not make you immune to the effects of having that happen. I loved my baby and I was ready to give him all that I had. I believe strongly that when you have a baby, you are agreeing to put that baby's needs first, no matter what. What I failed to recognize was that I had any needs to put second. I had always thought of myself as possessing boundless energy and the ability to take anything in stride. Seriously. So when Calvin was approaching the one-year mark and I started feeling a little off, I didn't get it. He was actually getting easier, so what was my problem?

I can still remember the day my husband came home from work and knew instantly that something was wrong because I was not talking—a sure sign. He pleaded with me to tell him what it was until finally I blurted out "I feel

like I don't exist. I feel like I'm no one, like I'm just not even here. I feel like I'm dead" and burst into tears. He was stunned to hear that even though I was not *unhappy* about any aspect of my life, I never felt happy either. "Never?" he asked. "Never." I hadn't realized it until I said it out loud. I was depressed.

Over the next several days, as we discussed the way I was feeling, I saw my husband's empathy give way to suspicion and fear. Was I saying that I was not happy with our life, that I might be thinking I wanted out? I reassured him that this was not the case and tried to make him understand the way I felt. "I wouldn't change anything about my life," I told him, "I want to be married to you, I want the baby. I just want to feel differently about it. It's all in black and white right now, and I want it in color." I'm not sure he ever really understood, but he did his best to be supportive.

At the time, I was a public school teacher and the system had recently set up an employee assistance program to provide free counseling services. I decided, for the first time in my life, to seek professional help. Part of me thought it was silly, but I knew I needed to do *something*. I made the appointment and went to the session. The program was structured so that I could have a set number of sessions with one counselor, and then if she felt I needed it, she would refer me to a private therapist whose services would be covered by my insurance. I talked to her about a lot of stuff from my past, about the way I was feeling and my fears about what those feelings would lead to. By the time she wrote my referral, I was tired of talking about it. I decided not to go to the therapist.

I did, however, have a personal breakthrough as a result of all that talking. The counselor had not done much besides restate what I said to make me feel like she was listening, but I had said some things out loud to her that I had never admitted, even to myself. I realized that I had shed my old, somewhat unhealthy and definitely not mother-like identity, but I had failed to fashion a new one. Aside from being the mother of this very demanding baby, I was no one. I had stopped writing and even reading books, which had been a lifelong passion. I'd lost touch with all but a handful of friends who also had babies. There were other things that I had thought of as defining qualities and actions that I knew were better left behind, but they still left a hole. The toughest thing to admit was that on a very crucial level, I did not trust myself not to return to old self-destructive habits, which would be all the more devastating now that I had so much to lose. I was just waiting for it to happen, as if I had no control over my own actions.

To complicate matters further, I was just coming to realize how much importance I placed on my appearance. For as long as I could remember, people had treated me as though I were special because I was "such a pretty girl." In my depressed and inactive state, I had started to put on weight. I looked exhausted, like someone who wasn't taking care of herself, and I felt that people were treating me differently because of it. This added to the sensation that the old me no longer existed, but it was also an eye opener. I had understood that others placed too much value on my looks, and I had used it against them. Now I had to face the fact that I had bought into my own beauty myth.

Admitting these things to myself, and eventually to my husband, allowed me to get some perspective and start to move forward. Of course I was capable of controlling myself, especially with so much at stake. I had a great marriage and a beautiful, healthy baby, and I was not going to sabotage my own happiness anymore. Gradually, I started to feel better. I had fallen into the trap of thinking I was too tired to do *one more thing*, even if it was something I enjoyed. I forced myself to fight through my apathy and exhaustion and start doing some things for myself. Nothing big—a girls' night out now and then, a juicy novel to be read over the head of my nursling. It helped a little. The main thing was just to keep going.

Eventually my needy baby turned into a gentle toddler who was much calmer than the others we knew, for which I was imminently grateful. He was also very verbal, which allowed me to relate to him in the way that came most naturally to me. He was still fearful and painfully cautious, but bit-by-bit, he began to embrace life. Once he turned three, he blossomed into a barely-shy, playful, happy little boy. Only then did I feel ready to have another baby. That second baby presented his own challenges, but I felt better able to handle them. I had learned not to let the task of mothering overwhelm my spirit. I never did recover the old self that I grieved that first year, but I had begun to excavate a truer self, one whose identity could not be lost to crying babies or extra pounds.

Looking back, I do not think anything could have made that time in my life easier or helped me avoid it. It's such a stupid cliché and everyone says it when you are pregnant, but having a baby really does change everything and there is just no preparing for it. Not everyone has to go through what I did, but *I did* have to because of who I was before and the way I had always seen myself. I don't think motherhood affects any two women in exactly the same way, but it affects all of us with equal force.

Flash forward again to my third pregnancy, later that same spring. Two friends of my husband have babies approaching the one-year mark, and they have invited us over to cook out with their families. The guys are off in the backyard somewhere, and I am in the kitchen with the two wives. They are both in that unmistakable, unavoidable New Mother adjustment period. They look from my four-year-old to my crawling baby to my growing belly with a mixture of horror and gratitude that it is me and not them. "I don't know how you do it," one of them says, shaking her head. "I know you won't understand this," I say with a smile, "but I would much rather be where I am now than where you are." And it's true.

Mothersville

Things Your Mother Never Told You

Rhonda Baker

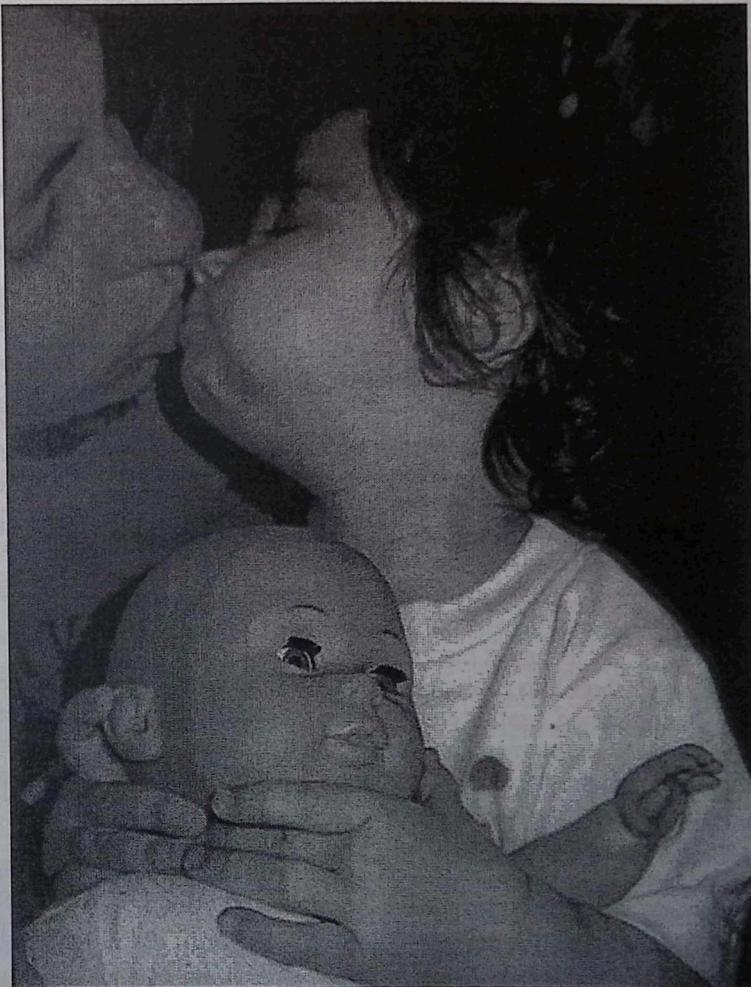
My mom and dad stopped having sex in 1974, after my third sister was born. I remember vividly my mom storming from their room yelling "Stop it Darren - I don't like fucking you!" I didn't understand, but I knew it was serious. I was about 9. A few years later, I think I was 12 or 13, she started spending a lot of time with other women friends. One in particular was a big Amazon butch thing - drove a school bus, no less - a woman named Peggy Cooper. She insisted everyone call her Cooper. Only my mother was allowed to call her Peggy...and she only did it when she thought they were alone. She called my mom "Fletch," short for Fletcher, our last name. Cooper and my mom spent a LOT of time together. Cooper's small wimpy husband worked out of town sometimes, and my mom would stay the night over there. I was pretty innocent then, and didn't think anything of it other than a slumber party... I knew they drank wine, but that was as sophisticated as my ideas got.

One summer day my sisters and I were swimming in Cooper's pool with her daughters (Cooper herself called them rugrats) and we had already been yelled at by our moms for coming in and out of the house too many times...so when I had to pee I avoided the back door and getting yelled at and snuck in the front door. That song "Honesty" was playing on the radio... "And sometimes when we touch... the honesty's too much..." and I heard Cooper say to my mom, "that's just like us, isn't it, Fletch? Sometimes when we touch, the honesty's just a little too much." I didn't understand it, but I filed it away in my 'remember this for future examination' file in my brain. Cooper and my mom split up, and my mom, after grieving, took up with a woman named Valerie. Same thing, spending the night, etc. But nothing was ever as intense or as long lasting as Cooper.

Years later, when I came out of the closet and my mother practically disowned me (she *did* say that she could not approve of me choosing such a 'difficult lifestyle' for myself - hmm, how would she know?) I remembered Cooper and the others. I never brought it up to her, because I knew she would deny it. But whatever happened to her, whatever process she went through, changed her in many ways.

She and my dad stayed married until he died in '92. As soon as I moved out, in '85, mom moved my dad into my vacated bedroom, and they were housemates. They lived together quite well that way. I know my mom had lovers, male and I'm sure female, but my dad never did. I told him once, on a visit home, that he should get a girlfriend. "I love your mother," he said simply. My heart wept for him. He was a good man. My mom had just started to realize it the month before he died - due to complicated circumstances she was near-suicidal and he took care of her. He held her while she slept, they went for a walk holding hands, they said 'I love you,' to each other. While I am glad my mom was able to get close to him again and appreciate him before he suddenly died, I only wish it would have been sooner.

Anyway, I think about this life crisis my mom had - she got married at 19, was pregnant with me at the time, had two more children, and became desperate to discover who she was outside of marriage and motherhood. I am glad I did things the way I did, even if it is frustrating sometimes. I don't worry about who I am, I don't worry about what I think I've missed – I'd done just about everything I ever wanted to do when I met Randy... except be a mom. So here I am. I am happy. Perhaps when my children are 12 and 10 I will hit that wall again, but for now, I am right where I want to be.



Izzy loves her mama!
Photo by Erica Carter

Feminist Children

Stacey Greenberg

I want to raise my children to be free thinkers and to challenge gender stereotypes and cultural expectations of how boys and girls should act. I want my son to be well-versed on women's issues as well as world issues, *not* as seen on TV by mainstream media. I am still figuring out how to do this. Luckily, I have some great women to learn from in my very own community. My mama friends are raising their sons in ways our mothers may have never imagined. Two of my role models happen to own their own businesses and they are both dedicated mothers who involve their children in their careers.

Katy operates Midtown Infant and Childcare out of her home. On any given day, she takes care of anywhere from 5 to 9 children. She makes it seem easy and there is no doubt that she enjoys (almost) every minute of it. She started the business eight years ago after the birth of her son, Everet. Everet is in school now, but spends time at the daycare in the afternoons and in the summer when he is not busy doing his own thing. I have seen Everet eagerly play with the smaller children, carry my son around pretending he is his little brother, and Katy has told me that Everet patiently encouraged my son to eat his entire serving of spinach one afternoon. One day after work, I was hanging out at Katy's watching Satchel in action and talking to her about books and new movies coming out. Everet came in to say hello and quickly informed us that the plastic pickle in Satchel's mouth was a choking hazard. We stopped our conversation, both surprised and proud, and laughed. I thought that was so incredibly cool and I had to stop myself from giving Everet a big hug.

Kristy opened Mothersville after giving birth to her third child last year. Mothersville caters to new and expecting moms and is a haven for breastfeeding women throughout the city. I often spend Saturday afternoons hanging out at Mothersville with Satchel. There is a great play area, comfy sofas, cold water, hot tea, great reading materials, and other mamas and children. Kristy's three kids (Calvin, 5; Joshua, 2; and Somerset, 1) are often at the store. One afternoon, I sat listening to Kristy describe several nursing bras, pads, and pumps to a customer who was pregnant with her first child. Kristy spared no detail and provided the woman with a wealth of information regarding nursing, pumping, and leakage. All the while, Somerset was in a sling, and Calvin and Joshua played nearby. I'm sure Kristy has provided the same information to many other pregnant women on many different occasions. She joked that when it came to breastfeeding, her sons would soon be experts. She's right. Instead of picking up useless information from the TV by osmosis, they are learning valuable information about breasts. Damn, that is cool too.

I want Satchel to spend as much time as possible with Everet, Calvin, Joshua, and Somerset. These are some cool kids. And the more time he spends with them, the more time I get to spend with their cool mamas. We all win.

Who are your kids playing with?

Miscarriage of Justice: How Losing a Baby Feels Like Real Rip-off

Laura Moulton

(A version of this article originally appeared on hipmama.com in April 2003)

I got pregnant on my 32nd birthday, after a clue in the scavenger hunt my husband Ben created for me led me to the bedroom, ("Go undercover," it said. I found a bottle of massage lotion under the bedspread). We met up there, and celebrated. A month later I peed on a stick and it was certain. How amazing to be pregnant. My breasts swelled up and were marvelous to behold. I ate up folic acid tablets and prenatal vitamins like I sensed an embargo around the corner, crunched dark leafy greens and made complete proteins my religion. A waitress at a vegan cafe showed me how to get my navel ring out. I felt vaguely queasy and more tired than usual, but life was grand. Everyone wanted to know: was I getting enough sleep? Enough iron? Was I having especially vivid dreams yet? It was a delicious club to have joined and I was ready to grow a baby.

Then I had a miscarriage at 11 weeks, and was thrust quite abruptly into a different club. There weren't any "How To" guides this round, nothing like "Your Miraculous Miscarriage," or "Miscarriage: A-Z." This is how it happened: On a Wednesday night, I noticed a faint, rust-colored bit of blood on a tissue. I tried not to freak out, but that's a joke. I phoned the midwife on call, and searched the Internet for information. Learned there's such a thing as "old blood." Everything is getting all set in there, shifting around a little, getting comfortable. So it makes sense to send a little old stuff out. Out with the old, in with the new, and so on. Plenty of women spotted through their whole pregnancy and delivered a perfect baby. But that was small comfort and I held my breath for about 12 hours, taught my classes in the morning, came home and took a nap (*calm, calm, don't panic*), went to an orientation for a community college job, and then finally admitted to myself that I was having cramps. I went to a fluorescent-lit student bathroom strewn with toilet paper and cigarette butts, (*please don't let me miscarry in this place*) and discovered I was bleeding. In the car home, heading east on I-84, I doubled over the steering wheel and I raged and wept. As the night wore on, I had legendarily strong cramps, climbed in and out of the bathtub, cried my guts out, sent my husband to fetch a mason jar, into which I deposited something like a red gelatinous hockey puck and also a small creature that had neither head nor discernible tail and looked like a string of turkey gizzards. I was pregnant and then I wasn't. Presto.

Miscarriages are really awful and gruesome, and words fail, which is perhaps why they're not talked about in any kind of mainstream way. People don't know what to offer up by way of comfort, and perhaps women who've had the experience have trouble articulating it. I certainly did, in the beginning. In an old Webster's dictionary, I found *miscarriage* listed simply as "abortion." What a strange word *miscarriage* is. There are different ways to parse it up: to miscarry something would seem to mean handling it carelessly or dropping it. Or there was to *miss* carrying something, which I did keenly. In my darkest, I scanned the dictionary for other words: mischance, miserable, misery, misfortune, mishap, mislay, misplace (as in, *I've misplaced my fetus, can you*

give me a hand?), mislead, (as in, *It seems my body mislead me from about week 7 on*). Ben said miscarriage sounded like a term from the 1800s. Like some Elizabethan misfortune that happened to depressed wives in dark, empty houses. Not something that happened to women on a regular basis. Whatever the case, I found that as common as miscarriage supposedly is, there is not much out there, save a handful of support groups, books published by small presses, and some online chatting about it.

There's an element to miscarriage that is fascinating from a biological point of view (if one has hindsight in their favor and is not still standing in a bathtub having one). The body is an efficient machine, and, recognizing bum material, boots it out. I read that most miscarriages resulted because there was information missing somewhere, so that at some point, the fetus stopped growing and eventually was expelled. Think of it as a novel that's missing the last 50 pages. It's impossible to continue, given what's missing. In my case, it took some time for my body to figure out that the thing inside me wasn't growing anymore. What a strange thing that my body produced the hormones that kept me convinced I was pregnant for up to 6 weeks beyond the time I actually was. My husband suggested that having a miscarriage seemed not unlike an alien invasion. One day my personality began to change, my body was different, and then after three months, suddenly it was over. It was bloody like a scene from *Aliens* and afterward, the alien thing was gone and just like the movies, everyone was exhausted and empty. I even felt like groaning, "Kill me," like Sigourney Weaver did.

Miscarriages are so common. Some sources say one in every 6 women. The fact that they are so common makes it difficult to find very much information about why it happened. After all, it takes having two or three miscarriages to get the attention of doctors, and only then do they recommend tests to try and determine what's going wrong. In my case, I brought my rough draft of a fetus in to the midwives, they sent it to pathology, and I waited anxiously for the results. I think I imagined they'd be able to provide me with at least a few definitive details. Things like what the fetus had developed so far, the age when it stopped growing, and the reason it stopped. But I got a phone call from a chipper nurse who said, "Just wanted to let you know that your specimen was (insert drum roll) *fetal tissue*." Ah, the relief. I mean, I'd feared it was a part of my lower intestine coming out, or a batch of baby kittens. I don't mean to sound bitter. It's just that I wanted to know two things: Why it had happened to me and that it would never happen again. Neither of these comforts were available, save knowing that I'm young, I can try again, and there are plenty of women who have a miscarriage and go on to have perfectly healthy babies. In lieu of a satisfactory explanation from the lab report, we had to imagine our own. Ben suggested perhaps the baby had been called to be a Brahman holy cow in India. I thought that perhaps it had put its ear to my side and listened to news on the radio, heard the words *terror* and *war on terror* entirely too much, whereupon it had decided against a hostile country, opting instead to be born to French parents living in the countryside, or to a blind masseuse living at a temple in Bangkok.

Here's an imaginary excerpt from the book I wish I'd found when I was having a miscarriage. Let's call it, "What to Expect When You're Having a Miscarriage":

"A miscarriage means disruption. A hiccup and then cessation of a small lifeline. It means being stuck with dried figs and strange high-protein, high-iron pregnancy snacks that you would never ordinarily eat, the sight of which inspires weeping. If you've got excited friends and family, it means you've already received maternity hand-me-downs and cool baby clothes from Goodwill. It means also that you will have to buy menstrual pads for the first time since you were fourteen. And it means a trip back to the same waiting room you'd visited while pregnant, same cheerful receptionists, same beautiful big bellies attached to pregnant women reading magazines, waiting for their appointments. Meanwhile, you're carrying *yours* in a mason jar, in a brown paper bag. It means feeling psychotic, since you are at once filled with the hugeness of what you've lost, and riding out mood swings, courtesy of the surge of hormones running for the exit. You might have thoughts like, *The last time I wore this skirt, I was going to have a baby.* Your friend who has a perfect three-month-old, and is devastated for you, will ask if she should bring the baby when she visits. You'll make a wry comment that you promise not to choke him.

The plus side of miscarriage is that you can go to bed and nobody asks you when you're getting up. You can read *Tintin* comics and stare out the window for hours. Now you can eat cans of tuna without fear of poisoning your unborn with mercury. You can polish off a bottle of wine by yourself. You can get as many x-rays as you want and change the cat litter whenever you feel like it. And hey, now you don't have to worry about the potential effects of biological warfare on your vulnerable little newborn.

You will be amazed at yourself, at how open and guileless you were when pregnant, how you charted the baby's progress, marveled at the miracles, (today it had a spine, by next week its neurological workings would be finished). There was nothing in your experience to tell you to slow up, to be cautious, to guard your heart against over-expanding..."

But as I write this, I'm finding I don't want to write a guide on how to miscarry gracefully. I didn't want to read about it while I was pregnant, and I assume that women will avoid this article unless they are nursing a common grief, or know someone who is. I don't blame them. When I was pregnant, I steered away from any dark topics associated with pregnancy and birth, and focused only on all the things that could go right. I'm afraid that's this tendency to shy away, to avert the eyes, is the very thing that makes for a shortage of good writing on the topic, when women need it the most.

The whole experience has been a learning process and even if I feel less bold now, I am likewise not gun-shy at the prospect of trying again. One unexpected outcome is that instead of being left with a keen sense of what I've lost, I have a better idea of what I have. Here's what I mean: The night I thought I might miscarry but wasn't sure, I sat on the couch crying and I caught sight of a photo on the wall. It's a picture I took in Guatemala of a little girl dressed in

colorful woven clothes, with her baby sister strapped to her back. I'd played with them when I lived in their town, Patzicia, a tiny village of cinderblock houses with dirt floors. As I studied the picture I thought for the first time of their mother, and realized that she would have given birth to them under pretty incredible circumstances, with no clean place to lie down, no hospital if there were complications, and suddenly my dilemma seemed pretty paltry. I had hot water for a bath if I suffered cramps. I had friends and family on hand, bearing hot soup and bouquets of flowers. As painful as my singular experience was, I felt, even as it was happening, that I was joining a veritable chorus line of others, a family of women who'd suffered much greater loss than I had.

I can feel myself trying to compose a nice, tidy conclusion, one that details what I've learned and how I'm a better person for it (think *Chicken Soup for the Miscarriage Soul*), but there are no neat endings. My pregnancy was a work-in-progress, suddenly interrupted. Miscarriage is an unraveling, a coming undone, and though there is a point where things are finished from a biological perspective, there's no telling when the rest of the process ends, or if it ever does. If conceiving a child is a leap of faith, so too are the months that follow. Things can go wrong, but there is also a good chance that they'll go splendidly. In the end, we are left with little choice but to bless the one that got away, wish it safe passage to its next life, and forgive it for leaving us. Then we take a deep breath and start again.



Rhiannon and Luna enjoying a snack
Photo by David Markle

IN THE FIELD

A Call to Arms and Breasts

Stacey Greenberg

When I was in high school, I knew people who stood on the corner across from the mall holding signs that read, "Fur is dead." Friends in college joined local chapters of Amnesty International and attended war protests. I was interested in volunteerism and serving the community, but I never really considered myself an activist. I didn't feel really passionate about any one thing. I was more of a "go with the flow" type of person. I started working at a soup kitchen after buying a fake i.d. from the volunteer coordinator; I joined the Peace Corps after seeing "Dirty Dancing" in the theater five times and learning of "Baby's" plans; I decided to get a Master's Degree after a friend told me about an interesting program; and then an internship turned into well-paying job helping people. I married a man I met in the Peace Corps, bought a house, got some dogs, and planted a garden. I just did my thing and everything seemed to work out fine for me.

When I became pregnant, everything changed. I wasn't comfortable with the status quo regarding pregnancy and birth. The time I spent in Cameroon, West Africa as a Peace Corps volunteer had affected me in ways that I hadn't realized. I had never considered the politics of parenting in our country until a friend started midwifery school and opened my eyes to a world I never knew existed. I suddenly found it difficult to just go with the flow. I found that the ideas I had for myself didn't mesh with the ideas of the people around me, especially my family. I found that every decision I made, starting with my homebirth, was challenged. I found myself in a position of either keeping my decisions to myself or working hard to educate others on why I was choosing to be "different." I chose the latter. On April 21, 2002, I gave birth to one son and one mother. I saw this as a chance to start over, to live purposefully, and to think about my actions.

When it comes to parenting, I try to shield myself from negative messages and images that pervade most mainstream media. For instance, I do not watch shows like "Maternity Ward" or even the seemingly benign "A Baby Story" on TLC. I quit watching "Friends" after Rachel's ridiculous and completely unrealistic birth episode. I don't read the parenting magazines in the pediatrician's office and I recycle the formula companies' advertising rags parading as "magazines" that appear in my mailbox. I'm not interested in what Dr. This or Dr. That has to say about everything that could go wrong in my pregnancy, my child's first years, etc. I like to talk to real people, read zines, and do my own research. I belong to a few "alternative" online parenting communities and I have tried to build a strong support network for myself in my

community. This has made a huge impact on my life and given me the confidence to parent in the style that suits my family.

I don't like it when people give me unsolicited advice and I disagree with a lot of commonly accepted/unquestioned practices. In addition to having a homebirth, I did not circumcize my Jewish son, I don't vaccinate, I cosleep, and I plan to breastfeed until my son decides he is ready to wean. I know that these things may make me seem like a hippie (or worse), but I'm probably not that different from you. I doubt you could pick me out of a crowd. If it is a weekend, my avocado stained "Lactivist" tee shirt, pulled up over my breast, with my insanely cute 18-month-old son attached to my nipple *might* give me away.

What the hell is a lactivist, you ask? A lactivist is a lactation activist: someone who considers him/herself an advocate for breastfeeding, whether or not s/he's nursed. Lactivism comes in many forms: choosing to breastfeed, choosing to breastfeed for an extended period of time, choosing to breastfeed in public, choosing to smile at a breastfeeding woman, encouraging other women to breastfeed, educating the public on the benefits of breastfeeding, lobbying for pro-breastfeeding legislation, etc. Maybe you're already a lactivist, and didn't know it.

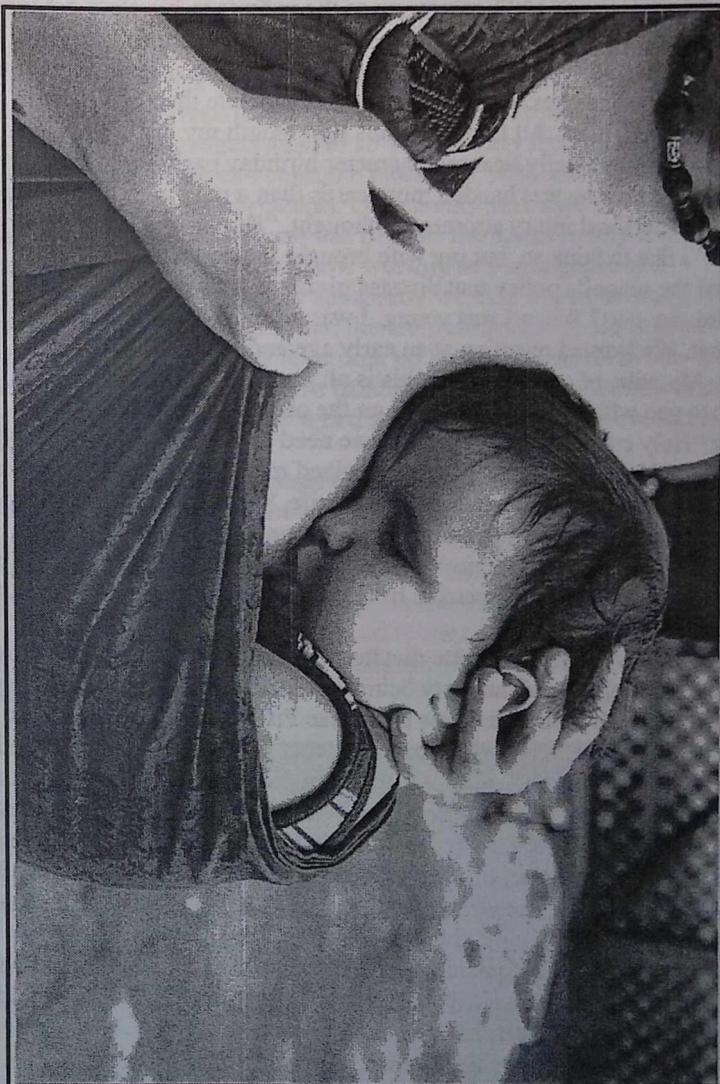
The United States has made some major strides in the past couple of decades. Formula companies have been required by law to state on their products and in their ads that "breastmilk is best." Laws have been passed requiring employers to provide time and space for women to express milk at work. Breastfeeding is slowly but surely coming back in fashion, even celebrities are doing it. However, breastfeeding rates are still alarmingly low and in general, breastfeeding is viewed as primarily for babies. Close your eyes and think about breastfeeding. What image comes to mind? A smiling woman holding a newborn infant? Well, I have news for you, breastfeeding isn't just for babies. Toddlers and older children do it too.

The American Association of Pediatricians (AAP) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six months and continuing breastfeeding for at least one year, while The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF advocate breastfeeding for two years and beyond. There is no agreed upon world average age for weaning, but many cultural studies detail a weaning continuum from birth to ten years (do not adjust your glasses). The United States is one of the only countries to wean its children by their first birthday. It is up to each nursing duo to decide when it is time to wean. Some women choose to breastfeed for six months, some for two years, some for four or more, and some not at all. To each her own, I say. However, women in this country need to be given more information and more support.

Sensationalized news story about "the horrors" of a woman nursing her three year old child abound. Extended nursing is often portrayed as a form of child abuse or a sign of the mother's unfulfilled emotional needs. Stories like those make me angry and sad. They discourage others from nursing their children past an "acceptable" age or encourage them to hide their nursing relationship. This serves to reinforce the image of breastfeeding being for tiny

newborns only. For those of us choosing to nurse our children for a year or more, we must be proud and we must be seen.

I wish that all the women out there who are nursing their infants, toddlers, and older children could feel safe to join me in public displays of nursing. I want lactating women everywhere to nurse their children wherever and whenever they want and for it to be perceived as completely normal and natural. It can happen and it starts with me and you. Lactivists unite!



Sagacious Star and his mama, Mandy
Photo by Linda Peirce

Happy Birthday Dear Visa Prescott Carlson

I just received my credit card statement today, and good news! I earned enough miles from my charges this month to fly around the world for free – twice. The bad news is that none of the items on the statement still reside in my house. They were all birthday presents for my son's friends. It seems that back in the holiday season of 1997, every one of the parents in his class got together over coffee and came to the unanimous decision to have unprotected sex. Merry Christmas indeed. Or perhaps a GQ article from the time advised men to take advantage of the amorous window of opportunity while their wives were in a shopping induced bliss. All I know is, this past month my kid's backpack overflowed with officially licensed character birthday party invitations on a daily basis. I swear he was handed more cards than a man with a neck brace in a room full of personal injury attorneys. I thought, "Hey, is my kid popular OR WHAT?" I like to think so, but my wife brought me down to earth and explained the school's policy that dictates giving invites to the entire class. When did *this* start? When I was young, I was allowed to invite five friends and that was it. We learned rejection at an early age and we liked it, dammit.

My wife, of course, thinks this is all great. My son loves parties, and she gets to gab with the other moms. I, on the other hand, have only one thought: "Holy crap, how many gifts do we need to buy for these ankle biters?" I seem to recall birthday parties where I received matchbox cars and baseball cards and was happy as a clam. I asked my wife, "So, what do we have to spend, like \$5 each?" I can hear you snickering right now on how clueless I am. Apparently, I could get by for no less than a plastic piece of junk that requires 16 batteries which just so happens to have a Spiderman decal on it, boosting the price to \$67.

It seems the new etiquette dictates that the value of the gift is directly tied to the extravagance of the party being attended. And parents these days are throwing bashes for their little tykes that make Puff Daddy's soirees look modest in comparison. The list of accoutrements at recent parties my son has attended have included: the various renting out of entire rec centers, amusement parks, and water parks, ponies, a magician (weird), a clown (scary), a clown magician (double weird and scary), a rock band, and – I'm not making this up – two monkeys. If they made non-alcoholic Cristal, I'm sure it would have been served. Again, harking back to my youth, my cronies and I had parties that consisted of pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey, a large pizza (two if mom had a coupon), and a goody bag containing a plastic car the size of my toenail, a noisemaker, and a stale Tootsie Roll. Apparently this lame scenario would net my son a yo-yo, a broken car, and a stick of gum.

Speaking of goody bags, I now know where the Oscar producers get their ideas for the elaborate gift baskets they give to the winners – they take a look at their kid's party favors. Is a Nokia cell phone and a spa certificate really appropriate for a 5 year old? I'm not only judged on the success of the party, but my success at keeping the party going after they've gone home, as well. My

wife recently accompanied one of her friends on a 20-mile trek to find the "just right" half-inch plastic dinosaurs. Not just any molded trinket from Target would do, despite complaints of tired and achy feet. From what I can gather, they were in search of tacky favors that were "charming" — no easy task, I can assure you.

I may make light of all this, but on another level I find the trickling down to our five year olds of our society's excess and adoration of consumerism rather disturbing. We're setting a bar for our children's expectations that someday we will not be able to surmount. The media every day is bombarding them with the idea that multi-million dollar homes on each coast, a fleet of cars (consisting of at least one 8 mpg all-terrain vehicle), and 6.1-carat pink diamond rings is a normal American lifestyle to strive for and achieve.

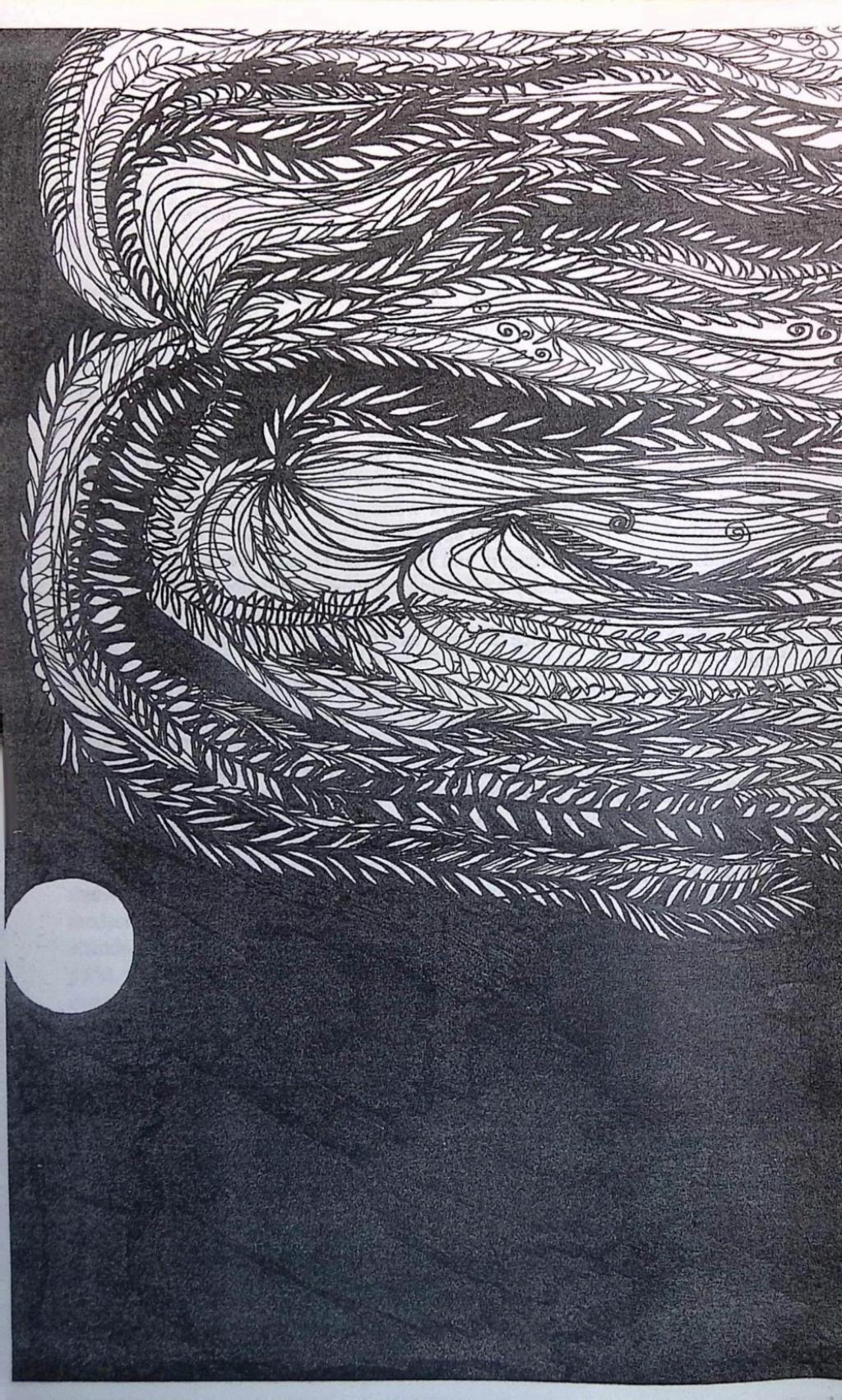
We want our gadgets smaller so we can carry more of them, and our McDonald's bigger so we can consume more of it. NBC has even taken to "supersizing" *Friends*, for chrissakes. Our parents have shed their Hippie ways, and mass consumerism and excess has become the norm. Jimmy Carter said in the seventies that "too many of us now worship self-indulgence and consumption." He was right — and apparently we didn't want to hear it. He lost by a landslide to Ronald Reagan, and the Gordon Gekko "greed is good" era went into full swing. Somehow it became no longer acceptable to take the kids to Chuck-E-Cheese and give them a handful of tokens each, we now make excuses for it. What was once accepted as a fun time and a big event is now the object of ridicule.

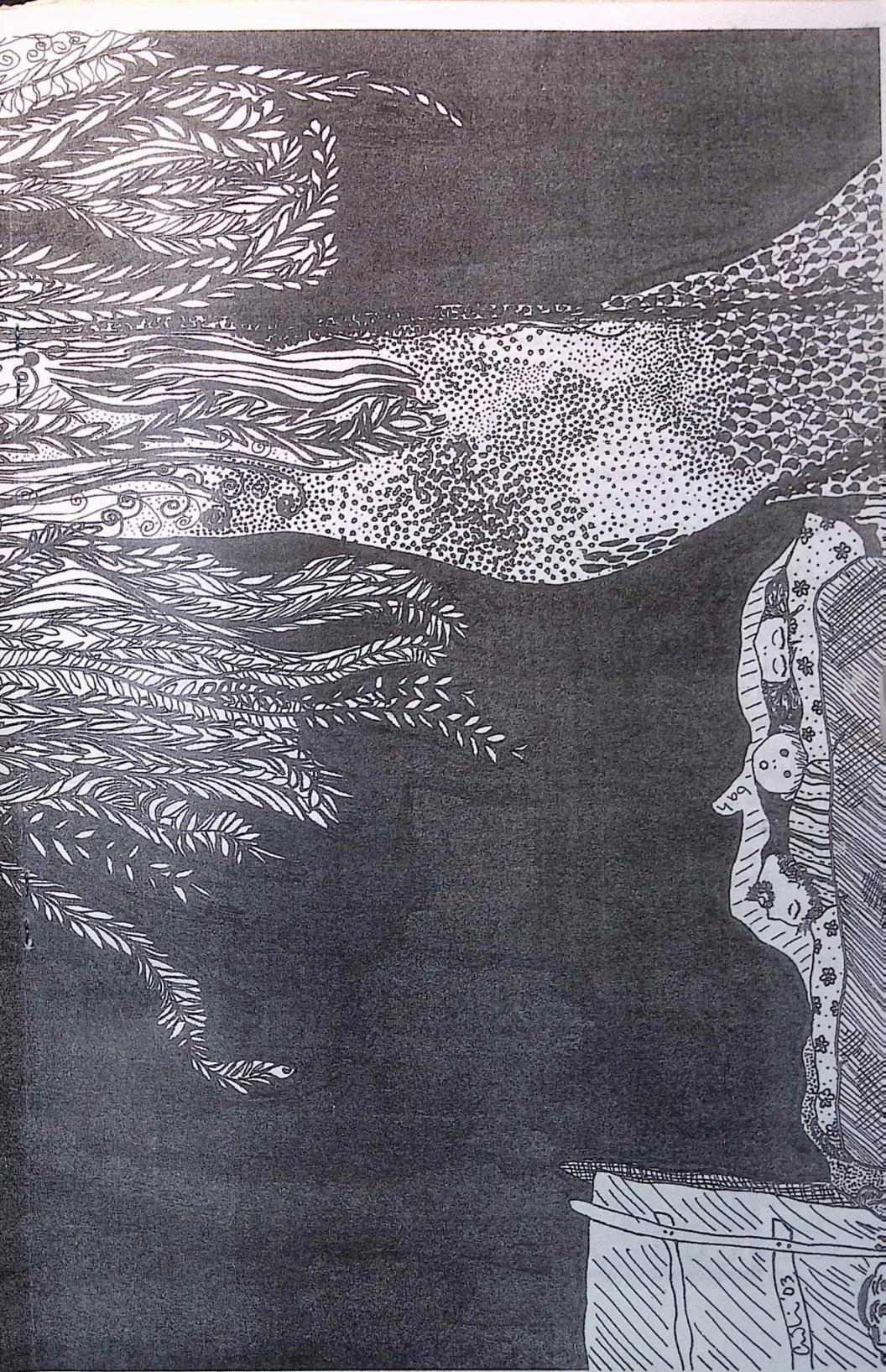
I'm not advocating to shed all of your worldly possessions and to get thee to a nummery. But part of the magic of childhood is being able to find joy in the simplest of pleasures, as witnessed when our young tot has more fun with the box than the gift that came in it. Why take that away from them? Why force a wellspring of glut and competitiveness on them at such a young age?

Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to start planning the venue for my son's sixth birthday next year. NASA doesn't just let you book the space shuttle at the last minute, you know.



Marlinee, Gus, and Piri weathering the storm in Germantown





Home Sweet Home

Sarah Diegl

I had one of those days last Saturday where I fell in love with my town again. It happens a couple of times a year. The day of the first big snow when I go outside and everything is clean and silent and still. The spring day when I drive into town on 250 and I can see the city from above vibrating pale green.

We started out with a trip to the Farmer's market. We got eggs and some kick ass blueberries. We saw at least half a dozen people we know including our midwife. Everyone commented on how beautiful the boy is.

When he went down for his nap I went yard saling. The very first one had exactly what I was looking for: cool cheap vintage stuff. I got some pillow cases and hankies. I washed them and almost all the stains came out. Stop number two yielded an amazing vintage Saks Fifth Ave baby outfit for \$2!

I made a quick stop at the Asian market and it was packed. There were lots of people of different backgrounds doing their shopping. It was a nice reminder of how much the diversity of our city is improving.

We went out for lunch downtown and the mall was busy but not annoyingly so. We sat outside and Rhew loved just watching the world go by. I had possibly the best fucking blue cheese burger and fries ever. It was so good I could not even sully it with ketchup. I love ketchup. Passionately. I never go without. That is how amazing this food was. I wish I had another right now. I'm going to dream about this meal. Best part, it's not a fluke. I had the same transcendent burger experience there when I was pregnant.

We then proceeded to Babyfest (a thinly veiled marketing ploy by our local university hospital). Lots of baby related businesses and agencies giving away info and tchotchkes and many booths touting the wonderful afore mentioned hospital where I did not and will not give birth. About five minutes after we got there I won a door prize. A \$50 gift certificate for yoga classes. Score. They also had free Ben and Jerry's strawberry ice cream. Double score.

The late afternoon was spent lounging by the baby pool.

To whomever arranged this amazingly kickass day which I badly needed to restore my faith in life being worth living, thanks. Well done.



Free Summer Time Fun with a Toddler

Stacey Greenberg

Last summer, Satchel was just an infant, so entertainment consisted of him sleeping in the Baby Bjorn while I went about my business. He couldn't see more than 12 inches away and his world was basically "all boobs all the time." This summer, Satchel was a full blown toddler very interested in everything, especially the great outdoors. We had a great time exploring the city and keeping ourselves stimulated and entertained for free. Here's a breakdown of some of the things we did for your enjoyment/future reference.

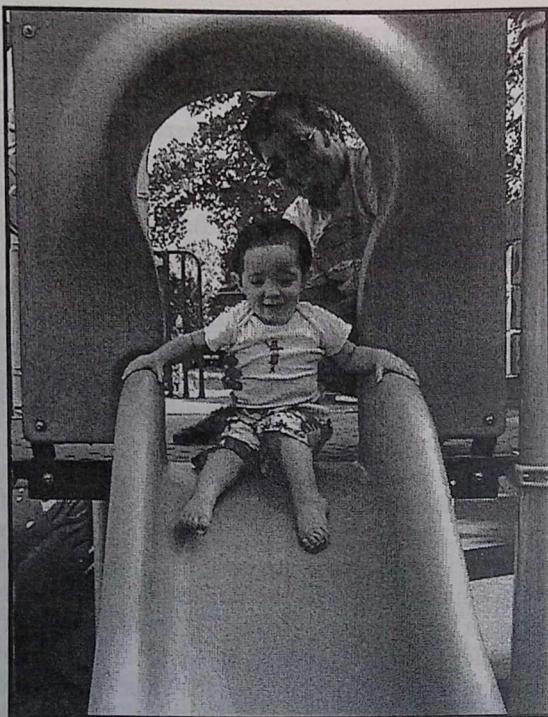
The Old Forest in Overton Park

I feel like I am always writing about this fabulous place, but it is such a treasure and hardly anyone uses it. Well that's not true. I guess the people who use it most often, the "Park Queens," have made it seem like an undesirable place. But on weekend mornings the park is filled with families, joggers, and dogs. If it weren't for the empty liquor bottles and used condoms, one could easily gloss over the park's more illicit uses. I digress though. The storm has somewhat limited our activities in the Old Forest due to the fact that most of the trails are impassable, but we still trudge out every Saturday and Sunday morning. Satchel absolutely loves the Old Forest and it has been so fun taking him and letting him walk the trails. I am amazed at how far he can actually walk before tiring out and asking to be put in the backpack. He is great about staying on the trails and he loves to pick up sticks, rocks, gumballs, flowers, etc. And with so many fallen trees, he has had the opportunity to see the inner workings of the trees. Caterpillars, butterflies, dragonflies, and cicadas have also been on hand (and *in* hand). And best of all, Park Services is building a new playground on the west side of the park.

Peabody Park

Peabody Park is our second stop after the Old Forest on weekends. We are usually there too early to see lots of kids but it remains a favorite. (It is also a fun place to visit after work—lots of kids and parents then.) I am often disappointed by the amount of litter, cigarette butts, stray clothing, and cardboard boxes left by the people who sleep in the park. Again I digress. Peabody Park has a great handicapped accessible playground and the swings designed for the handicapped children are a hit with children big and small. They are more like recliners than swings. My husband and I also get a kick out of the turnstyle letters that were put on backwards so that the only discernable word to spell is "war." Nice. The jewel of Peabody Park is the sprayground. No doubt about that. Once the sun hits at noon the playground equipment is too hot to play on and the sprayground is packed with babies, toddlers, older kids, and parents. It is fun to see the Central Gardens moms in their bikinis, the babies in their swimpers, and plenty of soaking wet people who are fully clothed. (I fall into the latter category.) For some reason Satchel loves water, but not when it is being sprayed at him. We spent many, many hours convincing him that the

sprayground was the place to be and he slowly got a bit bolder about playing. Maybe next year it will take less coaxing.

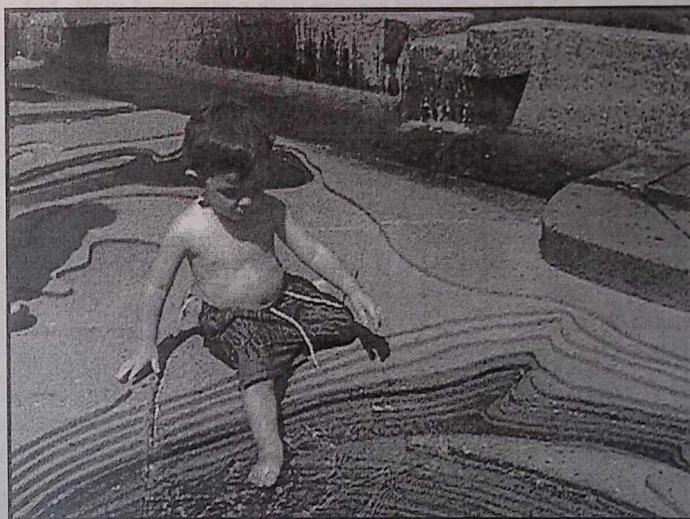


Satchel on the slide at Peabody Park

Mud Island

Mud Island is a place that I give very little thought to, like most Memphians, but my husband, who is not from here, REALLY wanted to see it so I begrudgingly obliged. Warren was most interested in seeing the mini Mississippi River (1/2 mile topographical representation) and I figured Satchel would probably enjoy it too. I remember thinking it was pretty cool when I was little. To save money, we decided to walk across the bridge instead of riding the monorail and it was actually a very nice walk. Satchel liked looking over the edge and it was amazing how many birds we saw. Once on the island, Satchel immediately wanted to get in the mini Mississippi. He was drenched in no time so I went ahead and put him in his swimsuit. He had a blast playing in the water and we were pleasantly surprised to see several other families there. I would highly recommend taking your toddler to check this out. Mud Island also has a great museum that my coworker spent half an hour detailing to me, but it costs \$8 and is four stories tall (no thanks). Also you should know that the snack bar is really lacking in healthy food options, so pack some snacks! Overall a fun place to

visit. Combine it with a trolley ride and a visit to the court square fountains and/or The Peabody to see the ducks and you'll have a whole day of almost free fun. (Having the energy for all of this may require a nap in the park or the renting of a hotel room though!)



Satchel in the mini Mississippi at Mud Island

Germantown Civic Center

I never would have discovered this place if Marlinee hadn't been rendered homeless by the storm and temporarily relocated to Germantown. The Civic Center has a really fancy water park, an indoor and outdoor pool. It's got a very country clubby atmosphere but is not terribly snooty. Memberships are pricey but a much better deal than the \$10 per person per visit price tag you pay at the door. However, Satchel and I were sneaky and got in for free on our one visit. (If you go, look like you belong and maybe you can get the five finger deal as well!) I wasn't surprised that Satchel hated the water park since it was the sprayground times 100 as far as jetting water and general chaos, but I was surprised by how much he loved the indoor pool. It was very calming to him and it was the most relaxed I have seen him in the water all summer. Once we spent an hour in there he was ready for the outdoor pool. He even went so far as to jump off the edge into my arms. It was great. It was also fun watching him try to "borrow" other people's "floaties" and charm potato chips from girls at the snack pavilion. If it weren't for the 30 minute drive we would be there much more often.

Little Gym

Little Gym is something that I have wanted to do, but have never actually been able to commit to. Marlinee and Julie have been going for a year and always talk about how great it is, but I've never wanted to get up and drive there on a

Saturday morning for the toddler class. (Saturday mornings are reserved for the Old Forest!) But this summer I had a few days off so I decided to take Satchel to the Friday class that Marlinee and Julie attend with their kids. Since it was our first class it was considered a trial and was free. (Since Marlinee got the times wrong, we got to attend two classes instead of just one!) The Little Gym does not look like much. It's basically just a room with a bunch of mats, but everything is kiddie sized, padded, and really, really fun. There's actually structured activities that the teachers lead, but the kids are free to run around and ignore them if they choose. Satchel chose to ignore them mostly. He had a blast and I will definitely consider actually signing him up for classes one day. (For now, I think I'll stop by for a free trial class every few months!)

Playhouse on the Square Matinees

On Saturday mornings Playhouse on the Square has a series of kids shows that are "pay what you can." We recently saw "Larry, The Show" and had a blast. Larry is a clown who juggles and specializes in physical comedy. He had lots of kids and parents from the audience come on stage to participate in his antics. There were probably 40 kids there of all ages and everyone seemed to really enjoy themselves. Check it out.

Redbirds

Ok this isn't technically free unless someone gives you tickets, but tickets are given away all the time. Since I work for the utility, I got free tickets as a thank you for our storm restoration efforts. (Seats on the grassy knoll are only \$5 so it is a totally affordable activity even without free tickets.) Warren and I took Satchel to the last home game and sat on the grassy knoll. It was fabulous. Satchel could run around and there were tons of other kids there. We even had nice weather! Older kids entertained themselves by rolling down the knoll and there was a playground, a climbing wall, and even a bungee jumping activity. The redbird's mascot also made a few appearances on the knoll and judging from the pack of children pursuing him, he was very fun to chase and hug. If you take a stroller, it is really easy to sneak in your own food and drinks.

Mothersville

Mothersville is the ideal place for new moms and babies, but it is also fun for toddlers (especially when the owner's kids are there too). There is a bright play area with lots of toys, space to run around in, and racks and racks of clothes to hide in. Mothersville also provides a nice comfortable place to sit and chat and nurse if you so desire. There's also cold water and hot tea. Best of all, Mothersville now has a resource center with alternative parenting books and magazines for you to read while you relax and watch your kids play. And of course, if you do have some money, feel free to shop and sign up for classes while you are there!

FERTILIZER

Fish Sticks
Ashley Harper

Toni looked up from her fish sticks and Le Seur peas. She felt the remote in her hand and glanced at her son twisting the ring in his eyebrow — three times daily as instructed. Quite suddenly her husband's knee happened to relax against her own, and her leg gave a spasm that she could almost hear.

There was a spot of ketchup on her blouse just where her right nipple touched the discount material. Her husband burped and was silent. The Brazilian pop band struck up loudly in her daughter's bedroom, and Toni's instinct to flee the house made her toes ache.

She put her fork down and lifted her TV tray to the side. In the kitchen, she pushed the swinging door shut, and paused in front of the sink. There was a Pyrex dish that her son had put in the microwave to melt baking chocolate, his favorite after school snack, and the white surface of the ceramic was webbed with cracks like dropped peanut brittle. Wet popcorn floated in a two-dollar wineglass. Two fingers of the powder yellow Playtex gloves that she used to wash dishes reached out from beneath a heavy pan that was filled with soapy water. A black crust of white rice lifted listlessly from its burned bottom and wavered gracefully like the hair of a mermaid.

Toni turned to look at the cabinets. The doors had begun to flake; their eggshell gloss leaned away in pieces. Slowly, she reached her hand up to a knob and pulled open a door. It creaked like storm cellar, high and wistful.

Peter Pan Crunchy
Campbell's Cream of Mushroom
Campbell's Cream of Celery
Campbell's Cream of Tomato
Save-Rite soda crackers
Green Giant corn
Hershey's cocoa
Canned tomatoes
Shur-Fine Macaroni and Cheese, 4 boxes

Where were the sun-dried tomatoes? The sesame seeds and walnuts? Why did she feel as if that stray bay leaf had been in the same jar since Aaron's thirteenth birthday? Did she really use Lawrey's seasoning salt? How long had it been since she had kept crystallized ginger or capers in her home? Hadn't she once been a vegetarian, or was that one of the characters in a book Oprah had urged her to read? It all ran together, the years before and the years since, like a thawed casserole that swam in shallow ice water.

She closed the cabinet and chewed the nub of her thumbnail. Was she humming, or was that the refrigerator? She stood to face the Kenmore and the slovenly mementos that curled up beneath magnets from the Statue of Liberty and Pigeon Forge. She opened the door which made a quick sucking noise, *thwuck*. The light poured forth, and Toni touched her hand delicately to her mouth, where it trembled like a fruit fly before a soft melon. She bent forward and leaned into the glare.

Maraschino cherries, one jar green

Maraschino cherries, one jar red

One can V8 juice, crusting slightly at the spout

A box of wine

Leftover tuna lasagna

Leftover fruit salad, the bananas humped together like something her cat might noisily expel in the corner of her bedroom.

A mug of cold coffee with a web of milk coasting along the surface

An opened package of double A batteries

Irish cream Coffee-Mate

But, what was . . . there in the back . . . behind the Tupperware with the bulging lid that threatened to blow a four-week-old cucumber and vinegar salad through the open door. A tiny transparent jar with a black paper label and gold scalloped edges. There was a thin indigo strip across the lid, a seal to ensure the freshness and quality of such an exotic and delicate imported product! It was a jar of pimentos! And, and, and there were black and green peppercorns floating in the silky olive oil that cushioned the fleshy red pulp! But when, where had it come from? How could such a thing be there, shoulder to shoulder with the Cracker Barrel caramel topping? Tucked away like a mother's milky pearls, like a flattened orchid corsage, a square of Ariquipeñan chocolate, or a wedge of frozen lemon chiffon wedding cake.

Toni reached timidly for the jar, but drew her hand back, unsure. The jar glistened with condensation. The fruit — for weren't pimentos really a fruit? — drifted in their oily preservative, suspended and dreamlike. Toni's eyes widened; she bit her lips. Again she reached, this time taking hold of the precious condiment and pulling it reverently out of the refrigerator. She rubbed her finger along the blue sealing paper, not noticing the letters spelled out across it, not seeing her son's name and grade section, or the title of his lab experiment written in a beautiful felt tip cursive across the blue tape.

Movie Review: Real Women Have Curves

Rebecca Ryan Hunter

Since I grew up and got fat, I've always thought I was just stuck in some moment, like I was walking in someone else's fat suit. I've never really accepted that this is my body, this is who I am. I have been working on body image for years, working to love who I am, and appreciating my figure as others do.

Today I am wearing a sexy outfit. It is tight and slinky and shows off this very real ampness. Maybe it was finally seeing "Real Women Have Curves" that made me feel sexy in this outfit and in this body.

I loved this movie for every fat girl who thought she didn't deserve a pretty dress or sex or happiness. I loved this movie for my curves and for the beauty that is in thin women, fat women, women with scars, women with breasts, and for the millions of women who do not look like models. And for the models who don't even look like models.

My favorite part of the movie was where reality met with fiction—the scene when all of the women sewing in the hot warehouse took their clothes off and danced. I was sitting there scoffing the scene saying, "Come on! Women don't do that...But wouldn't it be great if we did?" Then I realized that just 2 hours ago while I was getting my hair cut, I had lifted my shirt up as did several other women in the salon.

There was a very pregnant woman in there who was scheduled for a c-section in two days and was really scared. Specifically, she mentioned how nervous she was about the scar it would leave on her body. My very large hairdresser whipped up her shirt and said, "Oh, the scar isn't so bad after a while." Now, this woman had her c-section TWENTY YEARS ago!!! She showed her vertical cut, which actually healed nicely, but still looms large on the landscape of her body. Then her equally large sister whips up her shirt, pulls down her pants and says, "ROSE, don't scare her. They don't cut like that anymore. See? Now they do them horizontally!" It turns out that she'd had her cesarean birth TEN years ago and her horizontal cut is HUGE.

This poor pregnant woman looked so terrified, I stood up and said, "Don't listen to them," and whipped my pants down, shirt up, and pulled up my belly flap to show my teeny little four inch scar to her and say, "This is how they do it now! This was just a year ago," and she looked incredibly relieved.

So, I guess some women do show their bodies randomly when it can help other women. I, apparently, am one of them. Rent the movie and maybe you will be too.

Book Reviews

Kristy Dallas Alley

***Cunt*, by Inga Muscio** Let's just get one thing straight, before you read any further. This is not a book about using the word cunt so you can be a punk-rock badass. The word is just a jumping-off point. So even if you are way to prissy to ever utter the big, bad C word, you can still read this book and love it.

Inga Muscio has a vision. It involves women of all stripes doing some serious shit kicking. It involves menarche parties and mass harassings of date rapists. It involves you getting off your ass and doing a bunch of stuff you have been thinking and talking about doing for a long time. Like learning self defense. Like making sure your girlfriends get home safely after a night out. Like using the word cunt without blushing because it is, after all, just another word for your fabulous genitals, which someone has managed to convince you is the worst of all insults.

I love this book. I laughed until I was crying several times, as when the author describes her impression of the infamous "Period Movie" in grade school. And a few times I just flat out cried, as when she describes learning of her mother's girlhood rape. But mostly I nodded my head and thought "Amen, Inga. Rock on."

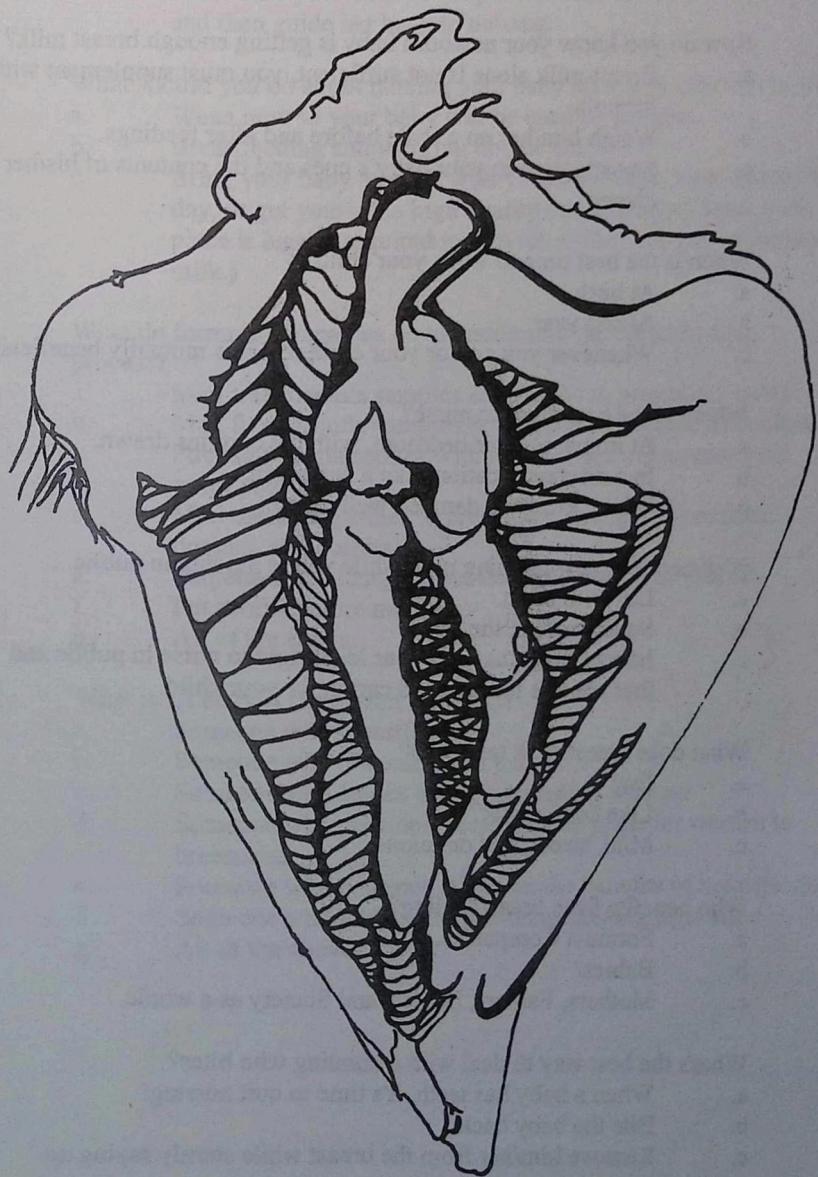
***Fresh Milk*, by Fiona Giles** This is not La Leche League's breastfeeding book. Fiona Giles' intention in putting together this collection of stories and thoughts on lactation is to bust through taboos surrounding the lactating breast. The result is like nothing you've ever read.

Early on, the book seems like what you thought it would be—fresh and moving, but not shocking. Women talking about their decision to breastfeed or not, a woman who pumps and donates after the sudden death of her infant daughter, the trials of thrush and learning to breastfeed in public, and having your Dad leave the room whenever you nurse. But about halfway through, the direction of the book seems to change.

The subject is sex. Sex and lactation. Not two things we are comfortable discussing together. Topics addressed include incorporating milky letdowns into sex, couples who induce lactation solely for sexual purposes, and lactation porn, among others. I did not agree with Giles's viewpoint on some of these issues, but I thought it took balls to even bring them up, and I could see what she was trying to say. All in all, the book was enjoyable, surprising, and completely worth reading.

Not Your Standard Coloring Book
Stacey Greenberg

Well if you liked the book *Cunt*, you'll love the coloring book! Here's a small sample of what you'll find inside *The Cunt Coloring Book* by Tee Corinne. Go get your crayons!



Lactivist Quiz
Stacey Greenberg

1. Why do women breastfeed?
 - a. Because they enjoy getting horrified stares in public.
 - b. Because bottles are too hard to keep track of.
 - c. Because it's provides excellent nutrition for the baby and aids in building a healthy attachment to the mother.
2. How do you know your newborn baby is getting enough breast milk?
 - a. Breast milk alone is not sufficient, you must supplement with formula.
 - b. Weigh him/her on a scale before and after feedings.
 - c. Pay attention to your baby's cues and the contents of his/her diapers.
3. When is the best time to wean your child?
 - a. At birth.
 - b. At one year.
 - c. Whenever you and/or your child feel it is mutually beneficial.
4. Where is the best place to nurse?
 - a. At home, in your bedroom, with the curtains drawn.
 - b. In a discreet location, like a bathroom.
 - c. Where ever you damned well please!
5. If someone says something rude while you're nursing in public....
 - a. Listen to them.
 - b. Squirt milk in their eye.
 - c. Inform them that it is your legal right to nurse in public and that you are feeding and caring for your child.
6. What does breast milk taste like?
 - a. Ew!
 - b. Like cow's milk?
 - c. Mild, sweet, and delicious.
7. Who benefits from breastfeeding?
 - a. Formula Companies.
 - b. Babies.
 - c. Mothers, Fathers, Babies, and Society as a whole.
8. What's the best way to deal with a nursling who bites?
 - a. When a baby has teeth, it's time to quit nursing!
 - b. Bite the baby back.
 - c. Remove him/her from the breast while sternly saying no.

9. You're nursing your easily distracted toddler in the mall. Something catches her eye, and she pops off the breast to see, leaving you bare-breasted and squirting. You:

- Are still nursing a *toddler*?
- Immediately crawl under your bench and hope death comes swiftly and soon.
- Make sure your excited baby doesn't hurl herself on the floor and then guide her back to nursing.

10. What should you do about nursing your baby after you return to work?

- Wean now so your baby will be used to formula.
- Breastfeeding and working do not mix.
- Bring your baby to work with you if possible, visit during the day, or get yourself a high quality breast pump. (Your work place is legally required to provide a place for you to express milk.)

11. What do formula companies do to undermine the breastfeeding process?

- Mail free formula samples & coupons to pregnant women.
- Mail free formula samples & coupons to doctors and hospitals.
- Publish free magazines with formula ads and coupons on every page.
- Mail these magazines to pregnant women, new mothers, doctors, and hospitals.
- Perpetuate the image of babies using bottles as natural.
- Put profits before nutrition.
- All of the above.

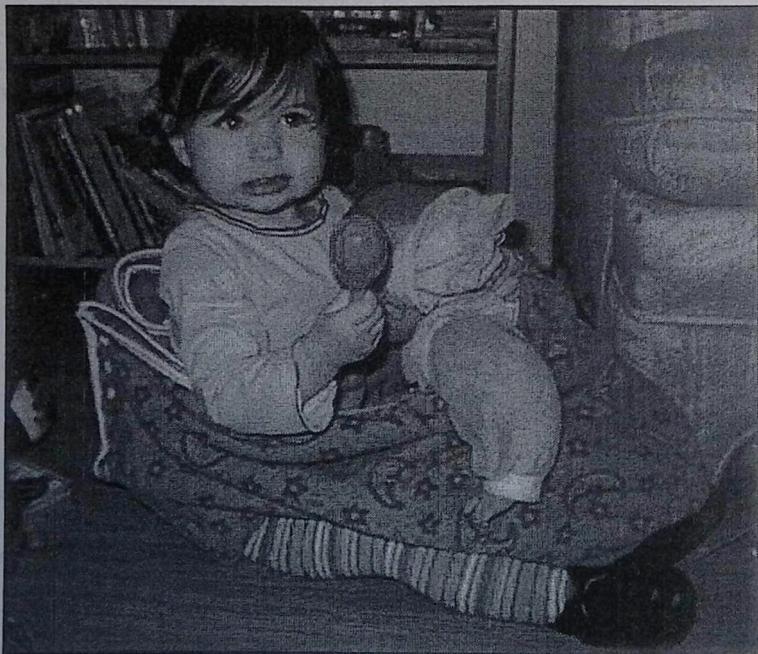
12. What is a Lactivist (Lactation Activist)?

- Someone who breastfeeds.
- Someone who breastfeeds in public.
- Someone who smiles at a breastfeeding woman.
- Someone who provides a comfortable place for women to breastfeed.
- Someone who educates others on the benefits of breastfeeding.
- Someone who lobbies for pro-breastfeeding legislation.
- All of the above.

Scoring:

For questions 1-10 give yourself 0 points for every **a** answer, 5 points for every **b** answer, and 10 points for every **c** answer. For questions 11 and 12, give yourself 5 points if you answered **a-f** and 10 points if you answered **g**.

100+	Congratulations! You are a Lactivist! You are well informed on the benefits & politics of breastfeeding and believe that breast is best! Time to order your Lactivist t-shirt (http://members.rogers.com/hipfolks) and tell the world!
50-100	You're getting there. Maybe you like the idea of breastfeeding, but don't fully understand what it entails and its impact on society. Do some research, talk to women who breastfeed, and learn more.
0-50	Wake up and smell the breast milk. I hope that this quiz sparked your curiosity and you will take it upon yourself to find out what all the hooplah is about.



Izzy nursing her baby doll while wearing her in a sling
Photo by Erica Carter

Zine Recommendations

Stacey Greenberg

A Beautiful Final Tribute (#7 In Time of Emergency: A Citizens Handbook on...Nuclear Attack) by Bee Lavender is a fucking masterpiece. The entire series is stellar and this issue is the Big Bang. If you read Bee's birth story in Mamaphiles and were blown away, then you will be thrilled to read this zine which contains *both* of her birth stories as well as the birth of the alternative online communities hipmama.com, mamaphonic.com, and girlmom.com. You can order the zine for \$2 postage included (trade welcome) from Bee Lavender, PO Box 28870, Seattle, WA 98118, or check out <http://www.foment.net>.

Compost This Zine is a one-off from longtime zinestress Liz Defiance. It is the result of her fixation on food politics and her desire to live a more DIY existence and self-sustainable lifestyle. This zine has a great mix of essays and information from gardening to fertility awareness, five finger discounts to biological literacy. Plus the zine has a handmade paper cover. It is a must have. \$1-\$3 in cash or stamps to: Liz Defiance, P.O. Box 26329, Phoenix, AZ 85068-6329 or email lizdefiance@hotmail.com.

Fit Pitcher (#1) is amazing to me on many levels, especially when it comes to layout. "Fit Pitcher" is a zine with dual themes, for multi-faceted mamas. Half is devoted to the striving, struggling, metamorphosing (and hopefully relaxing) mama in you, the other half is all about your inner rant. Sarah Cannon's zine is a welcome addition to the zine mama revolution. Get your copy by emailing saille42@hotmail.com.

Milk (#1) is a fun new zine out of Portland. The editor, Chester Nashvegas (not her real name), is from Nashville and went to The University of Memphis, so I of course think she is cool for that alone. "Milk" has a nice mix of art, essays, quotes, and daddy haikus. The author's "sometimes scary" drawings and the fabulous cover make this zine a must have. The reader will be both entertained and informed. Contact milkzine@aol.com for a copy!

Wrinkle (#3) is a zine that has been growing on me more and more with each issue. Kara Fleck has been putting a lot of effort into this one and each issue is unique. She's been playing with styles, sizes, and format, and it has been fun to see where she's ended up. "Wrinkle" is written by Kara and focuses on her stay at home adventures with Boo, her daughter. This issue includes some great rainy day craft ideas, stickers, color photos, and a bonus mini zine called, "Yes, I'm Still Nursing," which a collection of stories from nursing mothers (like me!). "Wrinkle" is \$2 issue or \$10/year(6 issues) or trade. Kara Fleck, 12218 parkview lane, Fishers, IN 46038. www.wrinklezine.com.

Yard Wide Yarns (#8) represents a year's worth of essays on punk parenting written by Jessica for her "My Mother Wears Combat Boots" column in *Maximum Rock N Roll* (She had nothing to do with the stinky review they did of "Fertile Ground.") I really enjoyed each essay and found Jessica's writing style to be casual and engaging. Check it out. Copies are \$1 and can be had by emailing yardwideyarns@hotmail.com.

THE MAMAPHILES!

Mamaphiles is a special compilation zine with the theme "birth." There are over thirty contributors, each of whom does her own zine. In addition to fabulous essays, comics, poems, and photos, Mamaphiles features a subjective history of zines and comprehensive information about each contributor's zine. To get a copy, send \$5 to P.O. Box 4803, Baltimore, MD 21211 or order directly from Mamas Unidas Distro (www.geocities.com/mamasunidasdistro).

MamaPhiles: a mama zine collaboration

by:

Kristin McPherson,
Peggy Ann Sinclair, Rhonda Baker, Barrilee Bannister,
Gaynor Taylor, Mariah Boone,
Andrea Buchanan, Candyce, Heather Cushman-Dowdee, Kara Fleck,
Rosa-Maria DiDonato, Lauren Elchelberger, Becky Ellis, Ariel Gore,
Cheryll Tappet, Faith Void, Stacey Greenberg, Kate Haas, Ayun Halliday,
Elizabeth Cable Landry, Bee Lavender, Vicki Law,
Kathy Fitzsimmons Lopez, Y. Madrone,
Sarah Martin, Noemi Martinez, China Martens,
Coleen Murphy, Nina Packebush, Jackie Regales,
Beth Sage-Weber,



RUTS INTO FURROWS

Elvis has Left the Building

Stacey Greenberg

Attachment parenting can sometimes take its toll, especially on control freaks like me. Breastfeeding for me became entwined with my son's sleeping for over a year. This meant that I was responsible for getting him to nap one to four times a day and to sleep every night. While wonderful at times, it was quite a workload, especially when cosleeping and nursing on demand at night. I worked myself into a pattern of being "on" twenty four/seven. This often led to me being less than perky at times and completely obsessed with time. Naptime/bedtime ruled my life and I lived for the 30-45 minute or more breaks that I occasional received while my son slumbered. I knew I needed help, but didn't know how to ask for it and then actually accept it.

After 17 months, I finally reached my breaking point. After an exhausting 2 day trip to Taos, New Mexico where Satchel subsisted solely on breastmilk and occasional snacks, I decided I absolutely couldn't take it anymore. I needed to sleep for more than three hours at a time and I needed to give my boobs a rest. Being pregnant once again, my nipples were incredibly sensitive and the experience of breastfeeding was becoming less enjoyable the more I had to do it. I actually experienced what can only be described as "breastfeeding rage." I could not relax at all and I resented each and every suckle. I found myself becoming increasingly impatient and even hostile towards my beautiful innocent boy who only wanted nourishment and comfort. I felt awful.

In a rather hysterical fashion I informed my husband that I was done. I was going to sleep in the guest room and he would have to deal with Satchel. (We had discussed nightweaning in the past, but never really made a plan or followed up on it.) He hardly seemed ecstatic, but it was clear that I was losing my mind. I slept alone until 3am when Satchel's crying woke me up. I immediately rushed in to nurse him, much to my husband's amazement. I told him that just the few hours alone helped and I thought I would be okay. I just couldn't stand to hear my son cry. The next day my husband suggested I sleep with earplugs in. I agreed, knowing that nightweaning would always be just a dream otherwise. The earplugs made a huge difference and I didn't come in to nurse Satchel until 7am. Needless to say, he was ecstatic to see me and nursed his brains out. Warren told me that he had cried for 45 minutes at one point and was very angry, but he was able to go back to sleep. He woke up a couple more times, but only cried for a few minutes. From then on, each night was a little better. Satchel seemed to catch on pretty quickly and started sleeping solidly for 10 hours or more by the 5th night. And he was fine.

It took me several nights to teach myself how to sleep through the night again. Even alone I woke up every few hours. It was a hard habit to break, but I too am now sleeping through the night. It is a wonderful feeling. One I have not had in almost two years. It has made this pregnancy much more bearable. I no longer feel like I need a nap and I can function much better throughout the day. I look back and I can't believe I waited so long to try nightweaning. I thought that it would be too hard for us both. I always felt like Satchel needed to nurse at night because of teething, hunger, etc. Most nights waking up two or three times was no big deal. I got used to it. It was only the bad nights, the every hour on the hour nursing nights that drove me batty. Looking back, I feel like the last six months or so the night nursing was probably more out of habit than necessity, but I it wasn't until just recently that I knew the time had come for a change.

Saying all of this makes me feel like some sort of attachment parenting dropout, or a "Cry It Out" supporter, but I'm neither. I still feel that breastfeeding on demand and cosleeping are wonderful parenting tools. And even though Satchel is nightweaned, he nurses on demand (which is not very demanding anymore—morning, afternoon, and bedtime) during the day and we are still cosleeping at night. In addition, this experience has brought Satchel and my husband closer together. Warren's ability to comfort Satchel at night and even get him to sleep without me is a godsend. Nightweaning has helped their attachment to each other become stronger. I feel like our parenting has equaled out considerably now that all things sleep do not involve my breasts.



Rebecca and Maggie enjoying Fall in New York

Raising a Jew, Greenberg Style

Stacey Greenberg

Whenever I tell anyone about my family's religious history I get a knot in my stomach. I am always a bit afraid that I'm going to be found out or kicked out or ridiculed or something. I have never really felt like I fit into the Jewish community although I do identify as Jewish. My husband (raised Catholic by a Buddhist mother) and I had a Jewish wedding and vowed to raise a Jewish family, but I'm finding myself at a bit of a loss. I don't know if I know how to do that, and what does that mean exactly? I have books and props and a Temple membership, but I already feel like I might be failing and my son is only 18 months old.

I was born to a Jewish mother (by conversion) and father (by birth). My father was far from religious and had to be coerced into participating in Seders, was dragged kicking and screaming to the synagogue for high holidays only to fall asleep, and had no problem with us going out on Friday nights to eat BBQ. He passed on very little "Jewish wisdom" to us; the most we got were some Yiddish swear words and lively rants in favor of Hanukah Harry and his Hanukah bush at holiday time. My mom was raised by a Catholic father and evangelical mother. Her father's family was actually descended from Spanish Jews who fled to South America only to be converted to Catholicism. My mother said she always "felt" Jewish growing up, although I'm not sure why. When my older sister, Leslie, was born, my maternal grandmother took her to get baptized one afternoon under the guise of babysitting. She didn't tell anyone until after she had done it. This did not go over well with my father's side of the family and eight years later when Tracey and I were born, my mother had converted. We were therefore, "officially Jewish" according to Jewish Law (it is passed through the mother).

My paternal grandfather died before I was born and my paternal grandmother soon after. With them, the insistence of "doing" anything Jewish died too. I knew I was a Jew growing up, and that in Memphis it wasn't necessarily something to flaunt or be proud of. My (fraternal) twin sister got teased endlessly because of her big nose. People made fun of our last name (Greenberg=Greenturd). Kids told me jokes like, "Why did the Jews wander the desert for 40 years? Because they heard that somebody dropped a quarter." We didn't live in a Jewish neighborhood, have Jewish relatives in town, or even have any Jewish friends. And we celebrated Christmas so my maternal grandmother wouldn't get "upset." And honestly, we didn't mind getting presents or decorating the tree so it wasn't a very hard sell.

It wasn't until we were about 12 that my mom started sending Tracey and I to religious school on Sundays and later on Wednesday nights. (By this time, Leslie was 20 and wasn't included in the new push to be "more" Jewish.) We tried to fit in at Temple, but never really did. The only thing that won us any favor in the eyes of our classmates was the fact that we were picked up in a Porsche. (My dad had an endless string of Porsche clunkers that never ran for more than a few months at a time. It was by no means an indication of any kind

of wealth on our part. My Kmart brand wannabe Capezios were quickly uncovered as the fakes they were by Marcy Faber.) Even when we moved to the suburbs and attended the high school with the highest population of Jews in town, we remained on the fringe. Tracey was a blue-haired stoner and I was a bow-headed soccer player. We didn't belong to Mefty, the JCC, or any of the "cool" Jewish sororities. Neither one of us had a Jewish boyfriend or a Bat Mitzvah. If it weren't for Tracey's nose or our last name, no one would have ever thought we were Jewish.

After graduating high school, I attended the local liberal arts college and was immersed in the land of the non-Jews. There were required religious studies classes and my very own Rabbi taught the class on Judaism. There was also a class on the Holocaust. In these classes, I found myself in a new role, the token Jew. Suddenly I was the college spokesperson for Judaism and I didn't know anything! It was mortifying. After my sophomore year, I decided to spend the summer in Israel. I knew friends who were studying there and a car accident the summer before left me with a wad of cash. Hope, my childhood friend and fellow beneficiary in the head-on collision, decided to come with me. We basically left without any clue what we would do upon arrival. We figured we'd meet up with my friend and volunteer to work at the kibbutz where he was staying. However, by the time we got there, he had left and dropping his name didn't open any doors for us. They didn't need any volunteers. Fortunately for us, Hope was tall, blonde, and beautiful. We were immediately identified at the bus station as travelers by a hot German guy named Frank who worked for a youth hostel. The hostel was in Tel Aviv, walking distance from the Mediterranean, and populated with interesting people our age from all over the world. The owners soon fell in love with Hope and we got the royal treatment.

We probably would have stayed at the hostel forever if we wouldn't have blown all of our money partying in the first two weeks that we were there. After many failed attempts, we finally managed to find the kibbutz office and ended up living on Kibbutz Gilgal in the West Bank (by choice). The other volunteers were mostly English and our age. We stayed on the kibbutz for two months and had a blast; we even managed to get to know some Israelis. As a part of national army duty, a group of young Israeli soldiers lived next to our compound. While I was busy skinny dipping with Englishmen, Hope fell in love with a young army stud named Sharon. He spent a lot of time teaching us important Hebrew words and phrases (i.e. penis and "Can I have a beer?"), and explaining cultural traditions (i.e. how the Israeli workers showered with their guns). We also grew close to a few of the kibbutzniks and felt at home in no time.

The six day work week started to feel normal and we looked forward to Friday night Shabbat services and other celebrations. We learned the ropes of traveling in country and were invited to visit our friend's families in town. The kibbutzniks took us on field trips to Masada and the Dead Sea. We developed a taste for falafel and hummus. Even the weak beer and nasty cigarettes started to taste good. We were popular. We worked hard and were promoted to the date trees...quite an accomplishment for female volunteers. If my liberal arts college

tuition wasn't so pricey and my sense of obligation so strong, I would have willingly stayed on the kibbutz indefinitely like many volunteers before me. That summer, I felt accepted in a way that I never had before. In Israel just saying you are Jewish is enough. You are in the club.

My summer in Israel was enough for me to stop feeling like a poseur. When the time came, I insisted on having a Jewish wedding and I felt 100% confident presenting my case against circumcision to the Rabbi when my son was born. No one could take away my Jewishness, or my son's for that matter. Even if I never set foot in a Temple again. I'll probably never be the kind of Jew that people write about or emulate, but I'll continue to do what I can and hope that it's enough to give Satchel a sense of belonging, even if he's the only kid at Camp Jacob with an intact foreskin.

We are laying a Jewish foundation, small as it may be. To our credit, we did do a naming ceremony for Satchel, a.k.a. Shlomo Nitzan ("Peace Bud"); I have even incorporated his Jewish name into a catchy song for him. We have been known to celebrate Shabbat on occasion. The Hanukah candles were a hit last year. (I stoutly refused to have a Christmas tree much to my husband's dismay.) Soon Satchel will be old enough to go to Sunday School. Maybe we could even learn Hebrew together? Then go to Israel for a homeschool semester on the kibbutz? That would be fun. Maybe in teaching him, I can teach myself and we can both be more involved in the Jewish community. I can befriend all of the mothers of the kids in his religious school class! I'll volunteer at the JCC...or coach the JCC soccer team. Maybe I'll even have a Bat Mitzvah at age 44 – when Satchel's ready for his Bar Mitzvah – we could study together! Ok, I'm getting carried away. Maybe we can just be us and have that be enough.



Satchel looks for that Hanukah Harry guy

Birth of a Community

Bee Lavender

(This story is an excerpt from the zine "A Beautiful Final Tribute, Issue Seven: In Time of Emergency.")

We lived in Portland when I decided to have another baby. It was a controversial choice because I had only just barely managed to skid into some kind of stability with my extraordinary illness. But I felt healthy, and ready, and I was still young enough that I was willing to take the risk. The HMO had suggested removing my ovaries to avoid the potential of another cancer. My fertility did not seem like an open ended option. The pregnancy did not force me out of remission. I remained healthy.

I consented to genetic screening that put my fetus under intense scrutiny to identify potential defects. We learned that we were going to have a boy, that his spine and brain were normal, that he was developing at the correct pace. We also learned that the placenta covered my cervix.

I hired a midwife and planned to do a homebirth, or if that wasn't possible, a lay-midwife assisted hospital birth. We were assured by the perinatologist, the gynecologist, and the midwife that the placenta would move up with the expanding uterus. It was statistically improbable that a placenta previa diagnosed so early would be a hazard; the vast majority noticed in the first trimester are corrected by the second trimester.

But my placenta did not choose to move, and the only available treatment (suggested not only by the midwife but also by the specialists) was to visualize change. I'm not opposed to this at a conceptual level; I've had many experiences where the only thing separating me from the precipice is my simple desire to live. So I sat around the house for weeks, imagining the placenta creeping upward.

At the start of the second trimester I started to bleed. There wasn't much to do except continue the mental exercise and stay in bed; even after the bleeding stopped the pregnancy started to feel more like a miscarriage than a viable baby. I was allowed to get up to make snacks and pick up my daughter at school and go to medical appointments, but other than those tasks, I was required to remain in bed and focus on only happy and positive thoughts. I was not supposed to worry, and specifically was not supposed to retain in my mind the fact that a stubborn placenta previa that had not moved so much as a millimeter was quite likely to be a placenta accreta, which in turn usually means a risk of death to the mother and baby. It also, without exception, requires a radical hysterectomy. I was twenty-five years old and didn't particularly want to lose my uterus. I figured I had already lost enough of my body through the years.

We hadn't lived in Portland very long, had not managed to find a social network. The few friends I had in the city fell away. There was no rousing of a community to offer solace and assistance. The midwife had been paid in full through barter but even she started to fade out.

At week 30 I was at a medical appointment when I started to bleed again. My daughter was at school in another county and there wasn't anyone to call. I didn't tell the doctor what was happening because I knew that I would not be allowed to leave, that the danger was severe.

I drove myself, bleeding, to the school and tried to convince one of the other parents to help me. She agreed in a desultory fashion to watch my child for the afternoon but made it clear that she would do no more. I gave my little girl a kiss and drove myself to a different county to check into a Catholic hospital.

It was a calculated risk - I knew that if I was able to keep the pregnancy I would be in the hospital for the duration. I also knew that the HMO would not be polite about sterilization. I suspected, and still believe, that they would have taken my uterus rather than risk the expense of additional pregnancies.

Catholic hospitals are not allowed to offer information about birth control unless it is solicited by the patient, and even then, employees may opt out of the discussion because of their faith. I gambled that my atheist soul would be safer with a crucifix over the bed as I languished.

Without consulting me, the doctors decided to hold a special session with experts from several fields, take a vote, and send someone off to the archdiocese with a report about my interesting history. The doctors sought and received special dispensation to sterilize me.

For my own good.

When I not only refused the procedure but started to talk about lawsuits the doctors quickly withdrew the offer. If I had been properly socialized I would have listened to the doctors; I would have consented to their plans. The fact that I did not is the legacy of my youthful rage.

For the next five weeks, I was on full hospital bedrest, restricted to lounging on my left side. My blood pressure dropped so low I could stay awake only for short periods; I was too tired to read and spent all of my waking time listening to the BBC news reports about the slaughter in East Timor. My husband, Byron, was in the first year of graduate school and had to go to classes and work and at the same time figure out how to take care our first-grader.

We had absolutely no support from anyone. Not a single friend came to our aid. Nobody other than Byron visited me in the hospital. The midwife decided I was likely going to die and went on vacation.

My daughter says she learned to read during this time; she remembers going up Highway 26 and seeing the signs pointing to the left for the zoo and the right for the hospital and asking if they could please go to the zoo. She played at the foot of the bed for hours as Byron studied and nurses dropped in with popsicles and comforting words.

The baby was high and breech and rarely moved, as though he understood the danger waiting for him. At week 35 my uterus started to contract. He flipped and his head engaged with the placenta. The blood streamed out of my body and the doctors rushed me into surgery. They cut me quickly, a line straight down from my belly button, cut me before the anesthetic took hold,

and I could feel the incision and had to hold still as the scalpel ripped through layers of skin and muscle. I whispered "I can feel this" but the doctors ignored me until Byron yelled at them. I passed out after the shot, waking intermittently to flashes of pain and horror.

The baby was five weeks premature, with raspy lungs, a mewling, sighing sound. We refused to send him to the neo-natal intensive care unit for treatment; I put him inside my gown and held him tight and let my body be his incubator. My parents came from out of state to help and when they left, Byron's mother came from Colorado. But they all had jobs and could not stay very long.

It took an entire year to recover from the surgery (although I did not lose my uterus) and for the baby to catch up. The consequences of prematurity are both harsh and subtle, and as I paced the floors singing to my sensitive crying child I had hours and months to reflect on what went wrong.

I prefer not to tell sad stories unless they illustrate practical solutions to difficult problems.

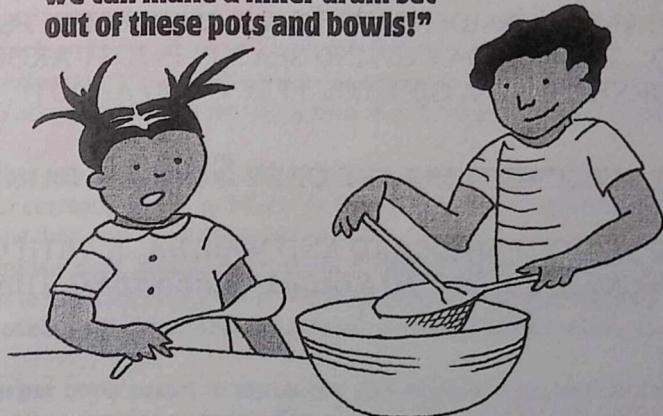
I decided that the worst part of the experience was lack of community. I realized that community doesn't happen automatically, just because of proximity, or because of need. I started to understand that true community is cultivated, nurtured, tended, and above all, that it is a deliberate and revolutionary act to set aside grievances and work toward an idealistic goal.

For the next five years I acted with diligence to create the kind of community I wished had been available when my children were born. I created a massive online support network and started doing large public events in my city. I published essays about the politics of parenting, edited and published an online parenting zine, and started web sites for both teen parents and artistic parents. My purpose was to facilitate friendship and kinship and social change.

I had no funding, no training, and no reason to think that my idiosyncratic notions would be helpful to other people. I started with two injured hands and big ideas, then set out to create something new for the radical and disenfranchised parents of the world. The projects grew and grew with very little direction other than a commitment to certain idealistic beliefs. The work was never easy, and grew harder over the years, but even in the darkest moments of organizational development, I knew that I was doing the right thing. If even one woman could have a friend, someone to help her in a similar situation, someone to laugh with, then the work mattered. I adhered closely to the concept that serving vulnerable people is more important than any career or personal goal. I simply want other people to have access to hope.

This from the “Boys will be Girls will be Boys...” coloring book by JT and Irit that focuses on rethinking current gender roles. It is full of fun pictures. To get your copy, email colormegenderless@facehugger.com.

**“Calvin, baking is fun and all, but
we can make a killer drum set
out of these pots and bowls!”**



(get some tape and make your own envelope)

From:

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A PLEA

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About the Gardeners

Kristy Dallas Alley is the owner of Mothersville (www.mothersville.com), the mother of three, and a writer living in Memphis. She likes her day job because she gets to touch her boobs a lot.

Rhonda Baker is a mama, a wife, a midwife, an illustrator, a zinestress, a seamstress, a coffee-drinker... living happy happy happy in Portland, Oregon. She is also the editor of "ZuZu and the Baby Catcher: Midwife Meets Motherhood." www.emeraldgiant.com/babycatcher.

Prescott Carlson is the editor of The Imperfect Parent (www.imperfectparent.com). His name has appeared on the cover of Harper's, The New Yorker, and Parenting magazines. Right there on the subscription label.

Andria Cline is a freelance writer/editor/webslinger. She's a native Minnesotan currently living in Midtown Memphis with her husband, cat, rabbit, gee-normous dog, and beautiful new baby girl.

Sarah Diegl is a chef, proud owner of the Preppy Handbook, and amateur psychiatrist to the stars. She lives in Virginia with her husband and son.

Stacey Greenberg is the editor of this fabulous zine, aspiring writer, mama, and more.

Ashley Harper never ceases to amaze me. She writes poetry, nonfiction, and fiction as well as drawing cartoons. She is the mother of two and a teacher of English in Peru.

Blair Henley is a new mama living in Nashville trying desperately to finish her thesis and her upstairs bathroom.

Rebecca Ryan Hunter is a riot and describes herself as "Rebecca, WOHM, cribbin, CIO, vaxin', c-section, bottle feeding mama to Maggie since 7/02, devoted soul mate since 6/95 to David, and happily expecting our blessed bundle of joy Dos 6/1/04!!!!"

Bee Lavender is the publisher of hipmama.com, mamaphonic.com, and girlmom.com. She is the co-editor of *Breeder: Real Life Stories from a New Generation of Mothers* and is working on two new books.

Laura Moulton is the editor of Gumball Poetry, which publishes poetry online and into gumball machines across the U.S. (gumballpoetry.com) She's a visiting writer in Portland high schools and teaches a writing workshop at the medium-security women's prison. Her stories and essays have been featured in The Women's Journal, Nervy Girl, and the Portland Tribune.

Caroline Oakley is a violin/guitar playing, bluegrass singing, contra-dancing mama living in Portland with her son and hubby.

Warren Oster is an archaeologist and nature lover who is sick of living in Memphis.

Fertile Ground

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